

**'It's much more muddled-up than that':
A study of assessment in an early childhood centre.**

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Keryn Davis

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For my mother.

Abstract

This dissertation discusses how a team of teachers, understand and practise assessment in the context of an early childhood centre. The early childhood sector has experienced raised expectations in terms of formal assessment in the decades since the education reforms of the late 1980s. These raised expectations have coincided with a shift in thinking about assessment, with the emergence of a new paradigm for assessment, and it is the combination of these that creates a number of tensions for practitioners in the sector.

This shift in thinking in the early childhood sector in this country has been shaped by changes to notions assessment, more universally. Educational assessment has been dominated by the positivist paradigm for over a century, however, as these positivist beliefs are questioned, a new paradigm has emerged for assessment, an interpretivist paradigm. For early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand this interpretivist paradigm sits comfortably with the sociocultural frame of *Te Whariki*.

This dissertation considers the impact of these influences on the teachers of this study as they make meaning of assessment in their context. How the teachers made meaning of assessment was found to be influenced by both 'outsider' and 'insider' expectations. Though the teachers accommodated the requirements of assessment defined by 'outsider' expectations, they did so with minimal compromise of their own beliefs and values. In accommodating these requirements the teachers contained the most 'formal' aspects of assessment as they saw it, by limiting the extent to which these 'formal' procedures were followed or impacted on their day-to-day work with children, parents and each other.

Instead, the teachers favoured approaches they identified as supporting their goals of building and maintaining strong relationships with children, parents and each other.

Preamble

This dissertation presents a qualitative study, of how a team of early childhood teachers understand and implement assessment practices into their work with children, parents and each other in the context of *Te Whariki - He Whariki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum*. As a professional development facilitator in the early childhood sector for the past seven years, I have become particularly interested in how early childhood teachers make sense of assessment in their work with young children, especially in the context of raised Government expectations around assessment that coincide with the emergence of an alternative assessment paradigm. This study was undertaken because there have been limited documented attempts at exploring what the realities have been for early childhood teachers in light of these expectations and this paradigm shift. This dissertation seeks to inform those who strive to understand and appreciate the complexities of assessment in the context of an early childhood education setting.

Chapter One sets the scene for this study and provides an overview of the significant Government legislative and resource initiatives since the education reforms of the late 1980s until 2005, designed to introduce and support formalized assessment in the early childhood sector. This chapter identifies some of the conceptual and practical tensions that have emerged through the introduction of these new expectations on the sector, particularly in light of the introduction of *Te Whariki* and the sociocultural theoretical position it represents. I also introduce the notion that the sector has experienced a paradigm flux, made evident through the legislative documents and resources developed during these decades.

Chapter Two discusses the dominant assessment paradigm, in this case, the positivist paradigm and an emerging alternative for assessment in the sector, the interpretivist. This chapter forms the theoretical basis of my study and I draw on the literature around these paradigms, to examine why a shift is necessary, and the alternative view taking hold in the sector. In the context of these issues I discuss why Anne Smith, in 1988, would liken the feeling of satisfaction gained by teachers and parents engaged in observation of children to that of the 'excitement of discovery felt by scientists' (1988, p. 33), and why Margaret Carr has turned her back on her own 20 year-old ideas about assessment, in favour of an alternative view.

In Chapter Three I describe the methodology applied in this study. Data collection was carried out between August 2003 and February 2004 and was split between two phases. I provide detail around the selection of an early childhood setting and the various approaches to data collection used, including individual and group interviews, observations and document analysis. This chapter also includes discussion of a change in tack taken in phase two, as I began to develop deeper understandings of my role as a researcher and my own theoretical position. This change in tack included the introduction of group workshops and video footage to engage the participant teachers in their beliefs and practice. I used premises to explore such issues as how teachers use what they carry around in their heads and where they get this knowledge from.

Chapter Four presents and discusses my findings from analysis of the phase one data. In this chapter I identify the two central themes of *meanings of assessment* and *assessment as contributing to practice*, that emerged from data collection and use examples from the data to illustrate these. I discuss why a teacher might compare herself to a tape recorder when documenting observations, or why others say, the most important thing they learnt at

College when it comes to observation is to use the words 'it appears'. I also consider why the teachers then turn their back on these ideas when it comes to the realities of working in an early childhood setting.

Chapter Five presents and discusses my findings from the analysis of the data, informed by the data collected in phase two of the study. This chapter describes my new understanding of the teachers' view of assessment and their realities sparked by the premise workshops I held with the teachers. I redefine the central theme of this study to *assessment as a complex, connected process* and detail why I think this is necessary. I describe how assessment in this setting is more elaborate than it first appears and I question whether anyone coming in from the outsider will ever really understand just how complex this really is.

Finally, Chapter Six details my conclusions from this study. In this chapter I discuss how the teachers either embraced or resisted the expectations of assessment based on their interpretations of these expectations. Of how the pull of accountability to 'outsider' expectations, is pitted against what the teachers intuitively believe is right for the children and parents they work with, and how this impacted on the meaning of assessment in their context and the approaches these teachers took. For those of us who sit outside of early childhood education settings and hope to change something about the inside of these settings, I describe how this study has reinforced for me, that we, the professional development providers, policy makers, teacher educators and accountability reviewers, need to be prepared to come to appreciate and value the realities and beliefs of the teachers in these settings if we are to be of any real use.

Chapter 1

The Rise of Formal Assessment in Early Childhood Education, Aotearoa New Zealand

This chapter lays out a picture of the gradual growth of formal assessment in the early childhood education sector of Aotearoa New Zealand since the education reforms of the late 1980s to 2005. The relationships between theory, legislation and practice is considered in light of key publications during this period, and is illustrated at times through my personal experience as a student, teacher and later as a professional development facilitator in the sector. The ideas and beliefs presented through these key policy and resource documents, either published or supported by Government, are emphasized as critical in shaping how assessment is viewed and practised in the sector. This chapter, and the next, set the scene for discussion of assessment in the context of early childhood education, and in particular for the study described later in this dissertation about a team of early childhood teachers 'doing' assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. This study considers what impacts on teachers' views of assessment as I explore how these teachers use narrative assessment to make decisions about the programme provided for the children they work with in their setting.

The early childhood sector and its construction of assessment

The early childhood education sector of Aotearoa New Zealand is a diverse mix of service types, character and cultures. Playcentre, childcare, kindergarten, te kohanga reo, pasifika language nests, homebased services and playgroups make up the sector, though even within these categories there are variations in delivery style and approach. The sector's diversity is often referred to as both a strength and a weakness with qualities and challenges uniquely different from its primary, secondary and tertiary cousins. But like these sectors, early childhood has been subject to significant change over the past two decades. Much of the

change early childhood education has experienced over this period has revolved around the Government's primary aspirations for the sector: raising participation and raising quality. The notion of 'formal' assessment found its feet in early childhood education by way of Government initiatives designed to realise these aspirations, with the most important events in the sector's assessment history arriving in the form of policy documents and resources. The most significant are: *Education to Be More* (1988), *Before Five* (1988), *Te Whaariki He Whaariki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (1996), the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs)* (1990), *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* (1997), the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996) with its supporting document *Quality in Action* (1998), and more recently *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Assessment Exemplars* (2005). These documents or resources signal pivotal moments in the construction of an assessment landscape for the sector and undoubtedly impacted on how practitioners understand and practise assessment in their settings. Figure 1.1 presents a timeline that illustrates the development and release of each to the documents and resources of interest during this period. In the following sections I present discussion of each document and resource and how they have influenced 'assessment' in early childhood education.

Education to Be More (1988) and Before Five (1988)

For the early childhood sector the education reforms of the late 1980s signaled the start of a long period of growth and change. Informed by the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group's report, *Education to Be More* (Department of Education, 1988) the publication of the Government's policy document *Before Five* (Lange, 1988), saw the early childhood sector enter the accountability arena as never before. Early childhood practitioners and advocates had been calling for more funding and higher status for many years. *Education to Be More* reinforced these demands and *Before Five* gave them these,

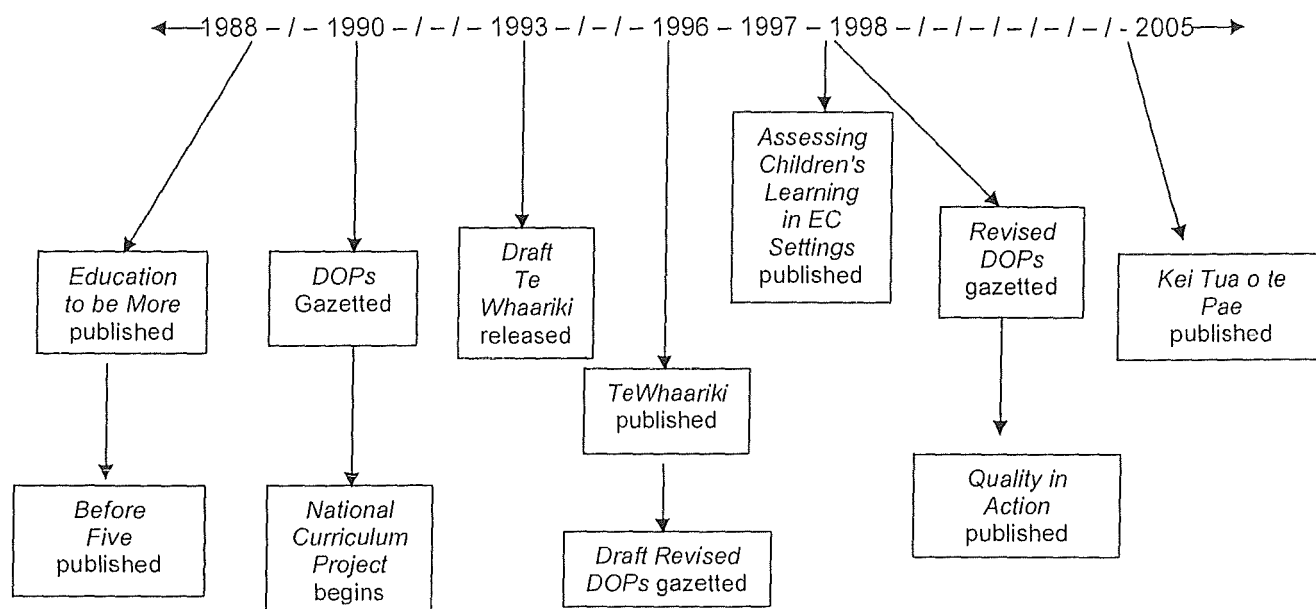
along with vastly increased levels of accountability in terms of administration, curriculum and assessment (Te One, 2003). Sarah Te One (2003) in her reflection of this time for education says the direction taken was:

...a bold social experiment...based on a philosophy of individualism and the supremacy of the market (Kelsey, 1995)...Liberal ideals of social equity and equality of opportunity were replaced by a consumerist approach that presented education as discrete packages available for anyone to purchase. (p. 22)

Among the more significant of changes for the sector born from this reform was the proposed development of a national curriculum framework for the sector. *Pre-Before Five* there was no formally recognized curriculum framework for the sector and no formally recognized guidelines for assessment. A curriculum framework would be needed for the sector before an assessment framework could be developed. It should be noted, however, that prior to *Before Five* the practices of ‘observation and assessment’ and ‘planning and evaluation’ were not new for the sector. ‘Observation and assessment’ had been taught for some time in some training programmes, though given the dominant western theoretical influences of the time, the emphasis was largely put on teachers to find out the ability of a child so as to match learning tasks to their developmental level. The view that children’s learning was ‘universal’ and could be understood in terms of norms of development, was a strong influence on practice at the time, and resulted in the belief that the goals of development could be discovered by looking at the child (Smith, 1996). This ‘universalistic’ view of development gave little attention or consideration to whose views these goals represented or whose interests they served. With ‘universalistic’ views in mind, learning experiences for children would be designed (‘planned and evaluated’) according to their ‘appropriate’ stage of development (Smith, 1996). ‘Planning’ was not usually conducted in the formal documented sense it is today, but it would not be uncommon for teachers to document the activities planned for the weeks ahead. Each service adopted their own

approach to these tasks, with emphasis at the time put on providing a safe healthy, play based curriculum for children.

Figure 1.1 Timeline of key policy and resource development and publication



Though *Before Five* makes no direct reference to 'assessment', formalised assessment found its footing more widely in practice through interpretation of the new emphasis on accountability of services to the state, the sector's desire to live up to its 'equal status' with primary and secondary, and the legislation that followed. The following section focuses on a key piece of legislation for the sector: the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices*.

The Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (1990)

The *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education, 1990) or *DOPs* reflected the Government's goals for early childhood services and contributed to putting into practice some of the policy expressed previously through *Before Five*. The

DOPs built on from a previous Ministry resource *Early Childhood Management Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 1989) widely known in the sector as ‘The Purple Folder’ that had guided practice in the new environment of charters. First gazetted in 1990, implementation of the *DOPs* became mandatory for all chartered services. The *DOPs* emphasised ‘developmentally appropriate’ programmes for children and provided objectives and practices around ‘responsibilities to the community and users of the service’ and ‘the learner, curriculum and programme’. Expectations of the service around ‘children with special needs’, ‘health and safety’ and ‘the environment’ were also outlined, as well as ‘relationships with parents and families’, ‘equity’, ‘management’, ‘staffing and staff development’, ‘advisory support’ and ‘land and equipment’. The *DOPs* spelt out the responsibility of practitioners to plan and evaluate ‘developmentally appropriate programmes’ for children, reflecting the theoretical influences of pre-*Before Five* days, while only specifying the requirement for assessment in relation to children with ‘special needs’, as stated below:

3 (b) to provide programmes for individual children with special needs in early childhood centres which include specific objectives based on careful assessment and monitoring of specific skills and activities and which are designed to maximize the strengths of children with special needs. (New Zealand Education Gazette, 1990, p. 3)

In translating the above statement into practice, children with ‘special needs’ were given priority by teachers in procedures relating to ‘assessment and planning’, while often extending this to include all children at some stage of their time in the early childhood setting. To illustrate in closer detail what practice looked like at this time, I turn to my own experience both as a student and beginning teacher during this period, to provide one example of how this legislation translated into practice.

My own story

As an early childhood student in the early to mid 1990's (post-Before Five and DOPs) I was instructed in the task of observation for assessment. There were many rules:

"Write what you see, not what you think you see",

"Don't include your personal opinion – remain objective",

"Write everything – don't leave anything out",

"Sit away from the child to observe – don't let them see you observing – you want to capture them in their true state",

"Include the context". For example, were you inside or out? What was the weather like? How many other children were present? Where was the observation situated?"

There were tools: clipboards, pens and paper, video and tape-recorders. And there were modes of observation: Time sampling, duration recording, event recordings, running records, checklists, anecdotal observations, samples of the child's work and questionnaires to parents.

As a student, and later as a beginning teacher, I was taught to ensure there were times during my week to gather a range of observations on a child. Often these were collected according to a pre-arranged systematic approach. I would be assigned children to observe at the beginning of the year and would work through that list one at a time gathering observations before interpreting these, compiling a summary, setting a specific learning objective and developing a plan for the child. Often I already had an idea in mind for what goal I would work on for the child prior to starting this process and usually this goal related to what was termed a 'need' in the child. I followed the 'planning cycle' I was taught in my training; observe, interpret, set learning objectives, plan, seek input from parents, implement and finally evaluate (more observation was necessary here).

The children probably had no idea what I was doing this for and I certainly didn't consider them to have a role in this process other than to be the subject of my inquiry. I did consider their parents as being entitled to some input though, and would make some effort in drawing their attention to what I had

noticed and planned in the hope that they would contribute their goals and ideas for what to 'work on' with their child.

Just as my job was made up of responsibilities, so too was assessment a responsibility. I had a list of children to work through, tools to use and space in the office to go about my paper work. Observation would occur according to the time I had set aside for this task. Sometimes these observations were 'focused' and sometimes 'unfocused'. Focused referred to the hypothesis I had in mind e.g. this child has difficulty interacting with other children. Unfocused meant I had time to observe, so I would simply observe to see what I could find out. At no time did I consider assessment to be an undocumented process, though I have no doubt that all members of the teaching team I worked within put emphasis and acceptance of personal undocumented assessments.

Time more often than not controlled when I would observe, rather than something of interest to the child, myself, the parent, other teachers and certainly not to a group of children, yet in my day-to-day practice as a teacher I valued relationships very highly. It seemed that when it came to assessment, I applied an entirely different set of principles to my practice from how I worked with children and families when not assessing [sic]. It was as if when it came to assessment a whole 'other' set of rules applied to my practice. Only later did I recognise the tensions that existed between my philosophy and assessment practices.

My student beginning teacher view positioned assessment as a task for the teacher. I believed I was a suitably qualified, well-trained observer and I never questioned my view as anything but the most important. I never considered my view to be dominating the assessment process or product, nor did I consider that another view could be more legitimate, worthwhile or useful here. I had studied Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological-contextual model (both as a student and later as a participant in professional development), though I never considered the influence of relationships between myself and the child, to the child and his/her family, or myself and the family, the influence of the environment or any

combination of these with the child and other children in the setting on assessment. Nor did I consider that these relationships could be supported and encouraged through assessment. The view I was taught and had accepted without question was one of teacher as expert. I controlled the assessment process and did little to consider the place of others.

The practice and beliefs described in my story during this period of my teaching were bound within the influence of legislation and theoretical traditions of the time. However, an alternative theoretical influence on practice was on the horizon for the early childhood sector that would begin to challenge some of these traditions. This challenge to the sector came in the form of a national curriculum framework: *Te Whaariki*.

The birth of Te Whaariki – the early childhood curriculum

In 1990 the Ministry of Education advertised for tenders to develop a national early childhood curriculum. Helen May and Margaret Carr won the contract to develop this curriculum, later to be known as *Te Whaariki*. In discussion of the *Te Whaariki* project, Carr and May (1996) reported concern from the sector at the notion of a national curriculum. While protection of independence and diversity was of high importance to the sector, Carr and May also stated that their project was to counter an alternative threat: not defining the early childhood curriculum at all.

...the alternative, of not defining the early childhood curriculum was, however, a potentially dangerous one for the early childhood organizations: the national curriculum for schools might start a downward move, particularly as the Government was introducing more systematic assessment during school years. (p. 228)

In May and Carr's contract proposal, they identified the need in the future for guidelines on assessment and recommended proposals for research in this area (Te One, 2003). It would be another six years, however, before the Ministry would commit funding to such a project.

The draft document *Te Whaariki: Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Guidelines* was released in 1993 to all early childhood education settings. In their paper *The Ideals and Realities of the Implementation of the New Zealand National Early Childhood Curriculum: Te Whaariki* (1996), Carr and May summarized the draft in terms of its key features: the weaving metaphor, a developmental continuum and the principles, aims and goals. Although the draft philosophy and framework of *Te Whaariki* was well received by early childhood practitioners (Morrow, 1995, cited in Cullen 1995), it soon became apparent that the philosophical framework was exactly that – a framework – rather than a prescriptive device and it relied on practitioners to ‘weave’ the curriculum pattern for their setting (Carr and May, 1996, p. 231). The effect of presenting a framework rather than a prescriptive ‘how to’, meant early childhood practitioners were placed in a position of accountability for deciding what the learning expressed in *Te Whaariki* would look like in action. The reliance on practitioners to make careful judgments and thoughtful decisions for children in their programmes in light of concerns in relation to low training levels, sparse professional development and limited financial resources, were highlighted as potential threats to the sector’s ability to successfully implement the curriculum (Cullen, 1995). Through the extensive consultation and trial processes these external tensions were debated widely by the sector (Cullen, 1995; Nally, 1995; Collins, 1996 cited in Carr and May, 1996), but Carr and May also called for ‘more rigorous theoretical critique from academia’ (Carr and May, 1996, p. 232). For those who looked more closely at the mix of theoretical perspectives of human development in the framework, internal tensions became apparent, a point I will return to shortly.

Following the consultation process, the editing of *Te Whaariki* for publication rested in Ministry hands. It was the Ministry of Education, rather than Carr and May, who had final say as to what exactly the curriculum would look like. *Te Whaariki - He Whaariki*

Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum was finally published by the Ministry of Education in 1996. Several factors impacted on what shape the final version of *Te Whaariki* would take. One factor was the timing of other Ministry of Education publications. During *Te Whaariki's* development, the publication of national curricula was underway for schools. The government was putting high value on outcomes based curricula and was keen for this emphasis to be reflected in *Te Whaariki* too (Te One, 2003). Internationally, the Developmentally Appropriately Practice movement, or DAP, based on interpretations of the work of Jean Piaget, was a strong influence on early childhood education at this time. In 1987 the National Association (United States) for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) had published guidelines for early childhood practitioners around DAP (Bredekamp, 1987) and this document was influencing thinking in many countries.

However, *Te Whaariki* was an attempt to break new ground in curriculum development and whenever such ground is broken, tensions are created that have both theoretical and practical implications. In the writers' aim to protect the sector from the push-down effect of the schools' curriculum, while also attempting to protect the diversity of the sector and reflect the cultural influences unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, they drew on a number of theoretical influences from this period. Examples of these theoretical influences include Constructivist Theory, Multiple Intelligence Theory, Information Processing Theory, Socio-constructivist Theory and Kaupapa Maori concepts of development, teaching and learning to name but a few. However, in their public discussions of the theoretical influences on *Te Whaariki*, those involved in the writing of the document such as Margaret Carr, Helen May and Tilly Reedy refer to the work of four theorists, so I will discuss the influence of these particular theorists on *Te Whaariki*.

Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Uri Bronfenbrenner and Erik Erikson provided the theoretical foundations for the document (Carr and May, 1991, 1993; Reedy, 1997). However, the adoption of the work of these particular theorists in combination by the writers of *Te Whaariki* created some significant tensions, a few of which I will highlight in this discussion. On the one hand, the writers were drawing on theory that positioned human development as being understood as inseparable from learning (Vygotsky) - while at the same time they looked to theory based on the notion that development should be considered separately from learning; that development drives learning (Piaget). During this period Jean Piaget's work was well recognized in education and reflected dominant views. Lev Vygotsky and Uri Bronfenbrenner's work, however, were relatively 'new' and only beginning to gain wider attention internationally, and early attempts to fuse the work of this combination of theorists with Erikson, showed itself in the draft document. For example, *Te Whaariki: Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Guidelines* describes what is desirable learning by way of lists of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes for learners, while, at the same time, advocates for programmes to be humanly, culturally, educationally, nationally, individually and developmentally appropriate.

Despite its combination of theoretical beliefs, *Te Whaariki* is repeatedly positioned as a sociocultural framework (Carr, Hatherly, Lee and Ramsey, 2003; Carr, 2003; Nuttall 2003; Te One, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2005). Carr describes this view as 'situative', that 'acknowledges that learning is distributed across, stretched over, cultural tools and other people (people, places and things)' (Carr, 2003, p. 2). As a curriculum framework, *Te Whaariki* sets the philosophical scene for assessment in the early childhood sector.

Te Whaariki has been compared to a dictionary - a place where meanings can be found, as opposed to a recipe book - with ready-made mixtures to copy (Ministry of Education, 1995,

p. 79), and relies on practitioners to interpret the philosophy presented in this framework into practice. How practitioners go about supporting this learning for the children in their settings is negotiable, but *Te Whaariki* does point practitioners to 'planning', 'assessment' and 'evaluation' as practices that will aid teachers in supporting this.

Assessment in the context of Te Whaariki

Te Whaariki provided more detail and direction about assessment than any previous early childhood documents from the Ministry. Where other documents had provided minimum standards, *Te Whaariki* provided a theoretical approach to practice and, in places some suggestions on how to implement this approach in practice. *Te Whaariki* offered two pages of guidance in relation to 'planning, assessment and evaluation', before a page of discussion around 'assessment and the principles'. In acknowledging the diversity in the sector, *Te Whaariki* encourages services to weave their own distinctive pattern when it comes to the programme provided for children and to do the same when 'planning, assessing and evaluating'.

In *Te Whaariki*, 'planning', 'evaluation' and 'assessment' are discussed as separate, and as, connected concepts. 'Planning' is discussed separately from and ahead of 'evaluation and assessment'. This separation of 'planning' from 'assessment and evaluation' is, I believe, residual of a history in the sector where an emphasis has been placed on 'planning'. It also gives a subtle message to practitioners about the order of these events in practice – first plan programmes, then assess and evaluate – however, other discussions in the document highlight the need to first observe, interpret and analyse before making improvements to the programme. Further fragmentation of 'assessment' is made in the document when the

distinction is made between the task of ‘observation’ and the tasks of ‘planning’, ‘assessment’ and ‘evaluation’.

The four foundation principles of *Te Whaariki* (Relationships, Empowerment, Holistic Development and Family and Community) are also the principles for assessment and it is in *Te Whaariki*’s discussion of the principles and assessment that a number of key messages are expressed, including:

- Assessment is a useful two-way process
- Children can be self-assessors
- Assessment leads to improvement
- Assessment or observing takes place within meaningful contexts and relationships
- Families are contributors to assessment
- Assessment strengthens communication
- Feedback is part of assessment
- Assessment is holistic
- Assessment is influenced by relationships
- Assessment is shaped by adults’ beliefs, assumptions and attitudes

Detail around the principles provide ideas for practitioners about the potential of assessment practices in their settings. However, given the design of *Te Whaariki*, how these principles are realized in practice relies on the clarity of these ideas to practitioners and how they are interpreted by practitioners. In its glossary, *Te Whaariki* identifies assessment as a process that is linked to improving outcomes for children. Specifically, assessment is described as:

...the process of obtaining, and interpreting, information that describes a child’s achievements and competence. The purpose of assessment is to provide pertinent information to contribute to improving learning opportunities for children. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 99)

The above definition indicates that assessment is used to inform practice. However, in the document's discussion of 'planning', it is suggested that it is 'planning' that is considered helpful to early childhood practitioners in developing understandings of 'what young children are learning, how learning happens, and the role that both adults and other children play in such learning' (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 28), a description one would expect 'assessment' to support, rather than 'planning'.

In *Te Whaariki*'s discussion of evaluation reference is made to 'all forms of assessment'. Earlier in this chapter I shared my story of practice as a student and beginning teacher. I described how I had used a wide range of observation methods:

... there were modes of observation: Time sampling, duration recording, event recordings, running records, checklists, anecdotal observations, samples of the child's work and questionnaires to parents....

The use of multiple forms of assessment points to assessment practices already in place prior to the release of *Te Whaariki*. Yet in discussion of assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki* Carr and May are clear that assessment will be a more complex process than in other curriculum frameworks, such as those for schools, and will rely on alternative approaches to those common in the early childhood sector at the time:

Given a curriculum model that sees learning as the development of more complex and useful understanding, knowledge and skill attached to cultural and purposeful contexts rather than as a staircase of individually acquired skills, the assessment and evaluation of children and programmes becomes a complex matter. Finely focused 'snapshot' assessments are inappropriate, and unreliable for the majority of young children (Barnett et al, 1992). Given, too a curriculum where knowledge, skills and attitudes often coalesce into learning strategies, attitudes and dispositions, traditional assessments of observable skills become problematic. (1996, p.10)

Though Carr and May felt that a different approach to assessment was needed in the context of *Te Whaariki*, professional development programmes already running by the time *Te Whaariki* was published based on the draft document, continued to promote the use of traditional techniques and tools. The following are selected extracts from the resource *Te*

Whaariki: Workshop Resource Kit (1995) published by the Ministry of Education for use in professional development programmes:

Assessment and evaluation should be based on precise (and recorded) observations of children and the programme. (p. 72)

There is a need to devise cyclical systems for gathering information on individual children, analyzing this, and setting objectives for them. (p. 155)

Minimise adult-directed experiences. The more time we spend having to initiate, help, do or complete tasks for children, the less time we have to observe...Know observation techniques thoroughly and what we will get from them. Using the wrong technique wastes our time and gives us inadequate information. Knowing techniques well means we know what we draw out when doing analysis (p. 166)

Effective Analysis: Objective, not subjective (p. 168)

Individual observations:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Weeks 1 and 2 - | Observe small group of children (2 – 5).
Use anecdotal observations and post-its.
Analyse observations: developmental domains, <i>and Te Whaariki</i> aims and goals. |
| Weeks 3 and 4 - | Set and implement small objectives for each observed child.
Evaluate at the end of week 4.
Start observation process for next group. |
| Weeks 5 and 6 – | Carry on process. (p. 170) |

The directions given in this resource are not alternative approaches to assessment rather these are examples of the dominant procedures and approaches from a pre-*Te Whaariki* era. Both *Te Whaariki*'s reference to 'all forms of assessment' I illustrated through my own story, and the extracts from *Te Whaariki: Workshop Resource Kit* listed above, are examples of how traditional practices or ways of doing assessment were simply continued into the new theoretical context of *Te Whaariki*. *Te Whaariki* had presented an alternative theoretical framework for the sector and was intended to present a 'new' way of thinking, yet assessment practises had not yet been designed to reflect this new way of thinking.

Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings (1998)

Following the release of *Te Whaariki*, the Ministry of Education supported a project with Margaret Carr again as director to consider assessment in the early childhood sector. Published in 1998, this research project was undertaken from 1995 to 1997 and designed to explore assessment in five early childhood settings in the context of *Te Whaariki*. The outcomes of this project included two reports and a 3-video series resource with supporting materials designed for practitioners. Though, this resource was designed for practitioners it was not distributed to early childhood services. Rather it was available for purchase should an early childhood team wish to use it themselves and for use in external professional development programmes such as those contracted by the Ministry of Education. By design, Ministry of Education contracted professional development programmes are limited in their capacity to allow all early childhood services accessibility at all times. In addition to this, early childhood services usually enter professional development programmes by choice and self-select the focus of this work. Also the use of this resource in these programmes was not specified by the Ministry of Education, therefore it would be difficult to judge to what extent and how this resource was used by facilitators in these programmes. With the combination of these factors in mind, this resource may only have reached a small section of the early childhood community. However, despite the limited exposure of the information presented in this resource, Carr's findings would influence the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education enough to later influence a shift in its thinking about assessment for early childhood education in this country, evident in its most recent projects discussed later in this chapter. Whether this influence was continued into the Policy Division of the Ministry of Education, or not, is a point I will return to shortly.

The definition of assessment used in *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* was that of UK researcher Mary Jane Drummond:

The ways in which in our everyday practice we observe children's learning, strive to understand it and then put our understanding to good use. (1993, p. 13)

The view of assessment presented here is one where assessment sits inside, rather than outside the curriculum (Carr, 1998b). Carr's resource also presents a sociocultural view of learning, That is, that learning as distributed across people, places and things in the learning environment (Carr, 1998a). The project introduces a number of key ideas for practitioners including:

- Each centre will choose their own assessment procedures
- Information is only recorded if it will be analysed and contributes to learning
- Assessments are accessible and interesting to all three audiences (teachers, children and parents)
- Assessment is not driven to be summative statements for external audiences
- Assessments provide an interwoven model of individual learning

These ideas reinforce some of the ideas presented in *Te Whaariki*, including the notion that early childhood services will weave their own assessment whaariki. The above also reinforces the belief that assessments will be complex, interesting and make a difference to children's learning rather than be driven by external accountability, thus shifting the assessment driver toward the philosophy of *Te Whaariki* and away from the accountability pressures of *Before Five* and the 1990 DOPs.

Through *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* Carr made significant progress on an approach to assessment she calls *Learning Stories*. This approach of Carr's is presented, both through text and in practice-based examples, within the resource and associated reports of *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* as

complementary to the sociocultural theoretical framework of *Te Whaariki*. Carr's *Learning Stories* are a means for documenting and approaching assessment, where observations and interpretations are situated within an interpretivist paradigm that utilizes narrative methodology together with a dispositional framework to assess. Carr drew on the thinking of Jerome Bruner when considering the potential for narrative as a means of communicating assessments:

Jerome Bruner (1996, p. 94) wrote that narrative is a mode of thought *and* a vehicle for meaning-making. By using narrative approach, a learning disposition will be protected from too much fragmentation, although skills and knowledge may well be foregrounded at times. (Carr, 2001, p. 93)

Learning Stories are founded on an entirely different set of beliefs and assumptions about assessment (and learning and teaching), than the views of assessment that have dominated the early childhood sector, and necessitates a shift of perspective around the purposes, authenticity and method of assessment within learning communities. For many early childhood practitioners they will need to reconsider issues such as:

- What teaching and learning is, what this looks like and what learning should be given value in assessments
- The role and purpose of documentation and the status or value of undocumented assessments
- Whose perspective or goals are recognized in assessment
- The voice of the child and their role in assessment
- The voice of the parent/whanau and their role in assessment
- The voice of the teacher and their role in assessment
- The authenticity of documentation and methodology to the audiences of assessment

As stated previously, *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* was both theoretically informed and research based. It presented an alternative approach to assessment, just as the project directors for the development of *Te Whaariki* had suggested was necessary for the context of practice under *Te Whaariki*. For many in the sector at this time traditional views of assessment continued to shape their assessment theory and practice, and though they may have been exposed to the ideas presented in *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings*, many teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, professional development facilitators and accountability agencies failed to recognise the paradigm shift presented here. An example of this failure to recognise a shift can again be illustrated through my own experience in the sector during this time as a teacher and later a professional development facilitator.

My Own Story

I recall how perplexed I was when, as an early childhood teacher, I attended a Children's Issues Centre (University of Otago) Conference in Dunedin at the time of the launch of the resources and reports associated with Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings. Margaret Carr presented her dispositional framework for considering what to assess, including video footage from the resource. I recall how uncertain I was about the 'validity' of this approach, what to assess now seemed too simplistic, had Te Whaariki been reduced to five 'things' called 'dispositions'? and Learning Stories - how were we ever to be taken seriously as a sector by using such an 'unprofessional' term? I had no understanding of how what was being presented by Carr was different from traditional beliefs in the sector and because of this I dismissed Carr's ideas immediately. Little did I know that within a few years I would become a professional development facilitator. It was in this role that I had time to explore Carr's ideas further. Together with my colleagues I would interpret Carr's ideas and develop ways to support early childhood practitioners to explore the use of Learning Stories. But for some time I continued to interpret Learning Stories through a traditional lens. I had failed to recognize the paradigm shift that Carr was presenting.

The draft Revised DOPs were out for consultation at the time of the release of this resource too. I assumed that because the development of both the Revised DOPs and Carr's resource were funded by the Ministry of Education, that they were talking about the same thing. The revised DOPs did, after all, include the language of Te Whaariki and what I saw in the DOPs looked familiar to what I had always been doing, with what seemed like only some minor changes to practice. I took this to mean that little would change to what I had currently been doing. I do not recall being alone in this assumption. The professional development programme I was involved with at the time was emphasizing how to 'do' the DOPs and the changes in terms of assessment seemed minor, greater importance seemed to be put on the job of getting the re-writing of policies done.

Earlier in this section I queried whether the influence of the thinking presented in *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* would be evident in the thinking of the Policy Division of the Ministry of Education as it had in the Curriculum Division. The sector would not have long to ponder over the theory presented in *Te Whaariki* and later in *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* as a change in legislation was already on the table for the sector and this was pushing the emphasis for the sector back to accountability. The combination of presenting 'new' theory and 'new' accountability so closely to the sector, had the effect of shaping teachers' understanding of assessment and what this 'should' look like in the context of *Te Whaariki*. Where *Te Whaariki* has provided principles for assessment with some description for practice, leaving the teachers to decide how this should look in their setting, introducing expectations for practice with accountability pressures meant teachers looked to examples of 'how to do it' rather than developing unique responses to the theoretical framework *Te Whaariki* presented. The following sections discuss this 'new' legislation being the *Revised Statement of Desirable*

Objectives and Practices (New Zealand Education Gazette, 1996) and its supporting resource *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (1996) and Quality in Action (1998)

One year after the publication of *Te Whaariki* and two years before the publication of *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings*, the 1996 *DOPs* were revised and the draft distributed to early childhood services. A slightly altered version was gazetted in 1998 making these *DOPs* mandatory for all chartered services. Around the same time its supporting document *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998) was launched. The revised *DOPs*, though reduced in length, featured a number of significant additions to the original 1990 version. The additions to impact most significantly on assessment, were firstly, the *Revised DOPs* mandated the principles, strands and goals of the framework and stated that curriculum had to be consistent with *Te Whaariki*, and secondly, the inclusion of statements surrounding expectations of assessment, this time for all children, specifically:

DOP 3 Educators should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the learning and development of each child, identify learning goals for individual children, and use this information as a basis for planning, evaluating and improving curriculum programmes.

DOP 4 Educators should implement curriculum and assessment practices which:

- a) reflect the holistic way that children learn;
- b) reflect the reciprocal relationships between the child, people and the learning environment;
- c) involve parents/guardians and, where appropriate, whanau;
- d) enhance children's sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners.

DOP 8 Educators should provide opportunities for parents/ guardians and, where appropriate, whanau to:

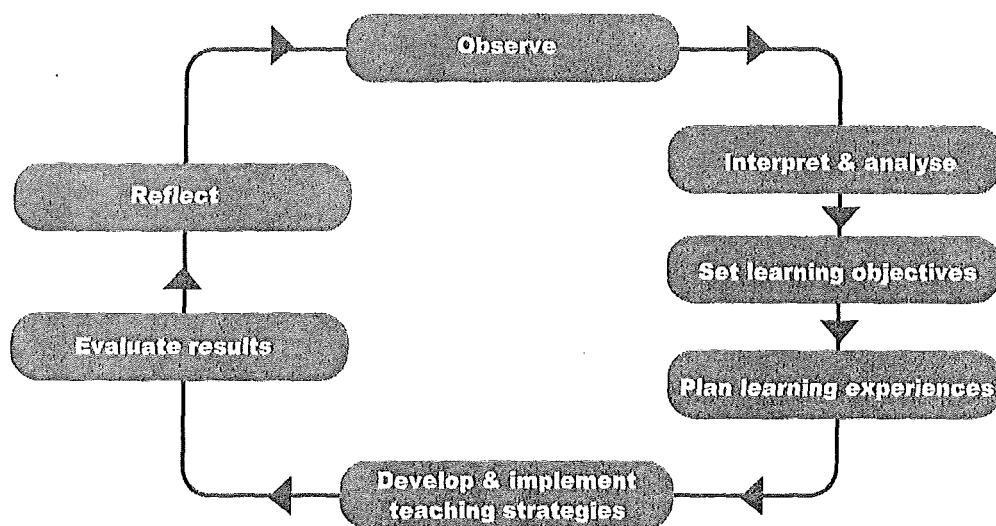
- b) discuss both informally and formally, their child's progress, interests, abilities and areas for development on a regular basis, sharing specific observation-based evidence;

(The New Zealand Education Gazette, 1998, p. 3)

The *DOPs* provided minimum expectations of all chartered services and given the systems and structures put in place to monitor the implementation of these requirements, such as audits by the Education Review Office, each of the above *DOPs* not only added additional expectations onto ‘assessment’ itself and what it will do, but added further pressure on practitioners to interpret the implications for practice and show what this will look like in their setting. The Ministry’s response to supporting services in interpreting this new legislation into practice came in the form of *Quality in Action*. This document was not intended as a prescriptive ‘how to’ resource. However, given the pressure on the sector to respond to the new expectations of assessment set in the *DOPs*, this is exactly what it became. For the purpose of this discussion I will focus on *DOP 3* as presented previously. *Quality in Action* provides an approach to implementing *DOP 3* in practice and this is presented through a cyclical illustration and explanatory text. Though *Te Whaariki* suggests it is important for each service to determine their own assessment pathway, or weave their own Whaariki, this cycle has become a ‘recipe’ that almost every service I have come across in my experience as a facilitator, works from. The cycle is presented in figure 1.2 and is based on the understanding that:

Children’s learning and development are the starting points for planning the curriculum, which is founded on educator’s understandings of current theory and on their understanding of each child’s knowledge, skills, interests, dispositions, and cultural background. (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 30)

Figure 1.2 Cycle illustrated in *Quality in Action*.



The term ‘assessment’ is not used directly in *DOP 3* or in this cycle but is used in *Quality in Action*’s brief discussion of the ‘evaluate results’ stage of this cycle. In later discussion, a further statement is made grounding assessment to evaluation for improvement of the programme and to enhancing children’s learning through implementation of this cycle. This is elaborated through discussion on using a ‘wide range of methods to gather information about children’s learning and development and the curriculum’ (p. 31). This type of cycle was not new to the sector. Variations of this model had been used prior to *Te Whaariki* and the presentation of this cycle in the context of *Te Whaariki* simply reinforced for practitioners the belief that traditional assessment practices sat comfortably with the theoretical frame of *Te Whaariki*. Furthermore, the assumption that ‘assessment, planning and evaluation’ should follow a cycle led by teachers, does little to support the principles of *Te Whaariki* or theoretical position of this framework.

Experience both as a teacher and as a professional development facilitator working with early childhood practitioners, tells me that the cycled approach presented above creates a number of tensions for practitioners when adopted into the sociocultural theoretical context of *Te Whaariki*. The most significant tension I believe arises from the assumption that assessment can be understood as a linear process. The undocumented interactive nature of assessment goes largely ignored in the cyclical approach, prescribed in *Quality in Action*, with tremendous importance put on the small proportion of assessments that are documented. The view that assessment is largely an undocumented interactive process linked to a documented one, is reinforced in *Te Whaariki*:

Assessments occur minute by minute as adults listen, watch and interact with an individual child or with groups of children. These continual observations provide the basis of information for more in-depth assessment and evaluation that is integral to making decisions on how best to meet children’s needs... (1996, p. 29)

The illustration of such a cycle encourages teachers to not only view assessment as a formal documented process but as part of a step-by-step process. This cycle is often interpreted by teachers to mean they should work through each of the steps of the cycle, for each individual child, in a sequential systematic way. As a result, the assessment process becomes formalised and extremely task orientated, stilted and driven by the need to complete this task for accountability purposes rather than by teachers being inspired by the learning they recognise as they work with children and their families. To explain further I place this view of assessment in the context of the principles of *Te Whaariki*, to illustrate the contradictions and limitations that develop from this particular combination of approaches.

Because of the emphasis put on the role of the teacher and the formality in the cyclical approach to assessment, the learning that is given value is usually teacher determined with few opportunities for authentic and timely child and family participation, limiting the potential for honouring the principles of *Empowerment* and *Family and Community*. Also, traditional ideas about 'observation' are widespread and entrenched in early childhood practice. By *Quality in Action* returning to a pre-*Te Whaariki* approach to 'assessment, planning and evaluation' it is likely that teachers will return to their traditions, particularly in terms of their beliefs about observation. For the sector, these traditions lie in positivist views of 'observation' and teaching. In carrying out this task then, teachers are likely to distance themselves from the learner when observing, interpreting and analyzing, for the cycle, and in doing so concentrate on learning as discrete, measurable and observable skills, contradicting *Te Whaariki*'s notion of *Relationships* and *Holistic Development* in particular. Traditional beliefs, tools and techniques that influence teachers do not 'speak' to children or families, thus compromise the principles particularly in relation to *Holistic Development*, *Empowerment* and *Family and Community*. The principle of *Relationships* is put at risk too, through the lack of attention given to the situated context of children's learning.

Despite the *DOPs*' use of the principles¹ of *Te Whaariki* to position assessment practices, the cycle presented in *Quality in Action* together with some of the language used in the *DOPs*, perpetuates theory and practice evident pre-*Te Whaariki*. As stated previously, Carr and May, the project directors for the development of *Te Whaariki*, pointed to alternative approaches to assessment in the context of this curriculum framework. Carr's *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* provided an alternative view of assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. However, the findings of that project appear to have come too late to influence the suggested practice presented in *Quality in Action*. The dominant traditional view of assessment is clearly evident in this Ministry of Education document purposely designed in order to support practitioners implement policy into practice two years after *Te Whaariki*, five years after the first draft, and three years after the project *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings* began. This overlaying of traditional practice on the new framework is further indicative of the gap in understanding between the theoretical approach presented in *Te Whaariki* and the practical application of this to assessment practice. By 2001, however, the Ministry of Education began funding a project that once again explored assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. This time, however, the project would be aimed at developing a resource for all members of the early childhood community and related sectors, and would attempt to make stronger links between the theoretical position of *Te Whaariki* and practice, using exemplars of assessment practice from over 50 early childhood settings. This resource later came to be known as *Kei Tua o te Pae*.

¹ Refer to DOP 4 stated earlier in this section.

Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment For Learning: Early Childhood Assessment Exemplars (2005)

In early 2001 the Ministry contracted Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee to develop assessment exemplars for the early childhood sector. Initially this project (*Early Childhood Learning and Assessment Exemplar Project* or *ECLAE Project*) was a pilot alongside the Ministry of Education's schools' exemplar project.

The intentions of the early childhood assessment exemplars were:

- To provide examples of assessment using the Te Whaariki framework
- To highlight learning outcomes from Te Whaariki in action
- To illustrate the four principles of Te Whaariki mandated for assessment in the DOPs
- To describe progress in a range of ways, compatible with Te Whaariki
- To highlight the connection between learning and learning opportunities in any one setting
- To illustrate assessments that include the voices of a range of participants
- To illustrate assessments that are meaningful and accessible to a range of audiences
- To reflect the value of early childhood experiences
- To illustrate links to the national school curriculum framework

(ECLAE Project, consent information, 2001)

The highly anticipated resource *Kei Tua o Te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Assessment Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2005) was launched in January 2005 with the release of the first eight booklets to all chartered early childhood services and schools soon after. The Ministry of Education contracted providers to offer professional development programmes to the sector and other related services and these programmes

commenced soon after. A ninth booklet (Inclusive Assessment Practices) followed later that year and at the time of writing this dissertation, the sector is awaiting the final ten booklets, to complete the series.

Kei Tua o te Pae identifies a number of ‘big ideas’ about assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki* and each of the first nine booklets are constructed around these themes, namely, that assessment will be:

- Formative
- Sociocultural
- Bicultural
- Inclusive of children’s voices
- Have positive consequences in terms of supporting community, competence and continuity
- Inclusive of infants and toddlers
- Inclusive of all children.

Like Carr’s *Assessing Children’s Learning in Early Childhood Settings*, *Kei Tua o te Pae* recognizes assessment as an on-going interactive process, and highlights the role documentation has in making valued learning visible to all of the audiences of an early childhood learning setting and in enhancing learning. The resource also positions assessment ‘inside’ the curriculum and emphasizes the belief that assessments ‘do not merely describe learning, they also construct and foster it’ (Booklet 1, An Introduction to *Kei Tua o te Pae*, p. 3). The process of assessment presented in *Kei Tua o te Pae* is adapted from Bronwen Cowie’s (2000) research of assessment practice in secondary science classrooms and is described as *noticing, recognising, responding*. The process is described in *Kei Tua o te Pae* as ‘progressive filters’. According to *Kei Tua o te Pae*:

Teachers *notice* a great deal as they work with children, and they *recognise* some of what they notice as “learning”. They will *respond* to a selection of what they

recognise...The difference between noticing and recognising is the professional expertise and judgments.’ (Booklet 1, An Introduction to Kei Tua o te Pae, p. 6)

Noticing, recognising and responding presents a new language for the early childhood sector and the resource suggests that emphasis should be put on shortening the time lag between each of the steps by practitioners (Booklet 1, An Introduction to Kei Tua o te Pae). The resource uses authentic ‘real-life’ annotated examples of assessment practice, collected from early childhood settings to illustrate this process in action and to point out key concepts seen as central to assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. Narrative is signaled as a useful means of documenting assessments and though the focus of the resource is not on one method or format (Booklet 1), no traditional observation methods are presented in the resource, signaling a shift in thinking around how to assess. Joce Nuttall (2005) describes *Kei Tua o te Pae* as an important contribution to education both nationally and internationally, particularly because of the position of assessment presented in this resource.

According to Nuttall:

....they offer an alternative to the administration of pre-determined, de-contextualised ‘tasks’. Instead, the *Exemplars* promote the observation of children’s learning and development during activities that are authentic and meaningful for the child. Although educators can interpret their observations according to the strands and goals of *Te Whaariki*, the framework for interpretation is deliberately broad, allowing educators to focus on learning that is valued within the specific cultures of centres and services. (Nuttall, 2005, p. 66)

In speaking about the project at a Hui for professional development facilitators in February 2005, Carr and Lee described the resource as a conscriptive device, one that is permeable and is intended to create a climate of informed discussion around assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. *Kei Tua o Te Pae*, according to Carr and Lee, also allows teachers to take ownership of the process, a concept reinforced in the comments by Nuttall, and were keen to highlight the need for such a resource given shifts in thinking about assessment, stressing:

We all come with our embedded view of assessment from the past. The lens of assessment has changed. We all need to take on a different view. We all need to come to terms with the change. We are in danger because of our default setting.

(M. Carr and W. Lee, February 2005, personal notes)

The introduction of the first booklet states clearly that the examples used in the resource are not being defined in the sense of ‘exemplary’, directing that judgment back to the setting the examples originated from, a statement made perhaps in an attempt to encourage practitioners not to perceive this resource as a prescription of ‘how to’.

As this chapter is being written, a review of regulations is underway for the sector and this new regulatory framework will include expectations for assessment. If history is anything to go by, *Kei Tua o te Pae* is in danger of being interpreted just as *Quality in Action* was, particularly if this legislation fails to reflect the theoretical frame of *Te Whaariki* and those in the sector fail to recognize the paradigm shift the writers of *Kei Tua o te Pae* are attempting to illustrate through this resource. The successes or otherwise, of attempting to make such change rests largely in the hands of professional development providers, teacher educators, policy makers and policy enforcers.

Conclusion

The early childhood sector has a short but complicated history of formalised assessment that forms a tangled web of theory, practice, legislation and diversity, unique to this sector and this country. On entering the Government’s umbrella of ‘education’, early childhood not only entered into a world of new expectations, status and accountability, they also entered into a new world of assessment. *Te Whaariki* was a bold attempt at protecting the sector’s theoretical identity and special character from potential push-down effects from the other sectors under this umbrella. However, the speed and amount of change imposed on the sector, and its growth during the past two decades, has created some significant tensions in some of the resources and documents that were developed and used during this period to bring about that change. Though many of these documents and resources were intended to

protect the special character of the sector and its diversity, and were never intended to be understood as prescriptive devices, the pressures put on the sector from such rapid change and growth has, I believe, led to a culture of accountability and reliance, rather than of innovation and difference as intended. A parallel set of changes to notions of assessment, more universally, has also played a part in shaping assessment in the early childhood sector and the next chapter discusses these fundamental shifts in paradigms.

Chapter 2

A Theoretical Context for Assessment in Early Childhood Education

This chapter explores the paradigms that shape the developments and practices embedded within the early childhood sector's views of assessment, before and after the introduction of *Te Whaariki*. I consider the views and practices associated with assessment pre-*Te Whaariki*, to be representative of a positivist paradigm, while the views and practices of assessment under the theoretical frame of *Te Whaariki* to be most representative of an interpretivist paradigm that draws heavily on sociocultural theories. This chapter discusses how these positivist and interpretivist paradigms have impacted on practitioners' thinking and actions, in relation to assessment in the early childhood sector in New Zealand. In discussion of the alternative interpretivist paradigm I turn to the work of Margaret Carr who has presented an interpretivist approach to the sector she calls *Learning Stories*, an approach I see as useful for practitioners to make sense of, and undertake, assessment in the context of the sociocultural frame of *Te Whaariki*.

The notion of paradigms and paradigm shifts

It was Thomas Kuhn who, as a philosopher of science in his study of scientific advance in the 1960's, conceptualised the notion of *paradigms*. In his classic text *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) Kuhn describes how he was struck by the number and extent of what he called 'overt disagreements' between social scientists about the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods, and how in combination with history and acquaintance, he was alerted to considering whether the same was true of natural sciences.

Yet, somehow the practice of astronomy, physics, chemistry, or biology normally fails to evoke the controversies over fundamentals that today often seem endemic among, say, psychologists or sociologists. Attempting to discover the source of that difference led me to recognize the role of scientific research of what I have since

called “paradigms”. These I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners. (1962, p. x)

Though Kuhn’s notion of paradigms was originally situated within his concept of ‘normal science’, paradigms are recognized widely within social sciences and are useful when considering the sets of assumptions about realities (for example, assumptions about assessment), associated with a community of practitioners (such as, a team of early childhood teachers), and how these assumptions shape these practitioners’ discourses, theories and actions.

Kuhn described paradigms as having two characteristics:

1. Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity.
2. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for redefined group of practitioners to resolve. (1962, p. 10)

Kuhn goes on to add:

To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted. (1962, p. 17-18)

A shift most often occurs because the originally accepted paradigm no longer sufficiently satisfies the practitioner or community of practitioners. When a shift is made, new realities are formed as new possibilities and potentials become evident. Language may be reconstructed to fit with the new view and this language assists in the ongoing construction of a paradigm. It is the creation of a new reality that makes a shift back to the previous paradigm impossible. If, however, no one questions a paradigm, then the tradition is continued and grows as new members enter it (Kuhn, 1962, p. 11). However, it is important to acknowledge that Kuhn did not believe that a paradigm shift was necessarily possible, or even desirable, in the context of social sciences. Unlike natural science, where paradigms largely remain stable until proven otherwise, the paradigms of social sciences are open to continual change and are therefore unstable, making a true paradigm shift difficult.

Locating assessment concepts within the frames that shape different realities is useful in developing understandings about the different views taken in the assessment debates, the different realities of practitioners, and in understating why such debates exist. Different paradigms will present different views about why to assess, what should be assessed and how we should go about the job of assessing. Glen Aitkenhead (1997, p. 4) suggests:

When we locate an issue (e.g. validity) within a paradigm, we can connect that issue with other issues (e.g. purposes of education) within that same paradigm. In addition, we can explore the different meanings of the same issue (e.g. validity) across different paradigms, thereby recognizing that some disagreements between educators may arise from the fact that the educators are functioning within different paradigms.

In social sciences, Jurgen Habermans (1971, cited in Aitkenhead, 1997) identifies three paradigms: the *empirical-analytic* of positivist origins, the *interpretive* and the *critical-theoretic*. Aitkenhead (1997) argues that the application of these three paradigms in the critique of assessment and evaluation, is more useful in considering the ‘issues’ of assessment, than simply employing a ‘traditional vs alternative’ approach. In discussion of assessment in the early childhood sector, I however, chose to explore two paradigms: the positivist and the interpretivist, a paradigm that draws, in the New Zealand early childhood sector, heavily on sociocultural theories. My selection of positivist and interpretivist paradigms for discussion of assessment is not to ignore other possible paradigms. Rather for the purposes of my study, the selection of the dominant view (positivist) and an emerging contrast (interpretivist), is most reflective of the paradigms currently influencing the assessment practices in the early childhood sector in this country. I use literature to discuss each of the paradigms and the implications these have on assessment practices in the sector in the remaining sections of this chapter:

The dominant view – the positivist paradigm

The pre-*Te Whaariki* view of assessment identified in Chapter 1 sits comfortably within the dominant educational assessment paradigm. The origin of this paradigm lies within a positivist tradition. Traditionally referred to as *educational evaluation* (Eisner, 1998) assessment's roots are within scientific ideologies of the Enlightenment (Eisner, 1998; Broadfoot, 2000). According to Elliot Eisner (1998), scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Condorcet, Condillac, Newton, Galileo and Comte, keenly explored the order of nature and later psychology laboratories in Germany and England applied the methods of the study of nature to the study of humans. The appeal of this notion extended into thinking about education and beyond:

The overall aim, rooted in the Enlightenment, was to create an objectively detached, true description of the world as it really is.

American educators, and particularly psychologists, saw promise in these methods for, with them, educational practice itself could become a scientifically guided activity (Joncich, 1986). For the first time, educational practice could be grounded in true understandings of how humans learn and educational policy could be formulated by appealing to scientific knowledge. (Eisner, 1998, p. 133)

Patricia Broadfoot a UK writer, believes that the dominant assessment paradigm was born out of the system of formal university examinations from early European universities and that these ideas and practices, in conjunction with hundreds of years of evolving educational practice, have gradually gained strength and momentum, infiltrating the wider education sector. It was the emergence of 'individualization orientation', away from the 'predominant communalist orientation', together with the emerging notion of rationality¹, through the major social movements of the Middle Ages that Broadfoot attributes the foundational acceptance of educational assessment:

...it was the new orientation that made possible changes in the whole range of social institutions – notably, politics, religion, law and education. It changed the underlying social values, the cultural discourse that made particular ideas and practices seem

¹ Rationality is referred to by Broadfoot in respect to both logic and ideology - of science, of logic, of efficiency and of individual rights and responsibilities (Broadfoot 2000).

right – even inevitable...it is the prominence of individualism and rationalism which makes *thinkable* the concept of assessment as we know it; which underpins a system in which, not only do ‘experts’ have the power to ‘judge’, but they are expected and required to do so; in which they are provided with ‘tools’ which are regarded as scientific and therefore fair and dependable. (2000, pp. 204 - 205)

Bruce McMillan (1991), in his discussion of human development theory, identifies that by the mid 1900’s the Behavioural schools (Pavlov in Russia and Watson in the United States) and the more holistic Gestalt school of Europe were the dominant view of human behaviour. According to McMillan, the dominant thinking of the time emphasized external influences on human behaviour and psychological investigations, were concerned in revealing the *processes* by which behaviour was shaped. Attention was not given to the contents of human consciousness, or to the influence of the social or cultural context. In this view, development was considered separately from learning, and development was perceived to drive learning. The work of Piaget and Erikson are influenced by this view of learning and development. Both Piaget and Erikson concluded that human development could be understood in terms of stages. Again, little attention was given to the context or the social influence on development. As discussed in the previous chapter, this view of learning and development is a strong influence on early childhood practice. Joy Cullen (2003) speaks of the sector’s ‘developmental traditions’. She comments that for those working in early childhood education in this country ‘developmentally appropriate’ was a well established concept and a natural part of the vocabulary of most early childhood practitioners at the time *Te Whaariki* was published.

The *purpose*, ‘*validity*’ and *method* of assessing are often referred to in assessment literature as fundamental to the assessment debate. However, how these issues are viewed and dealt with depends through which lens one views them. The scientific ideology of a positivist assessment perspective is based on core beliefs about order, the ability of procedures to

discover this order, truth and quantification (Eisner, 1998). Primary to this domination and shaping of the teaching and learning process is what Broadfoot (2000) refers to as 'a discourse rooted in a rationalist vocabulary of scientific measurement – of standards and scales; of objective judgments and comparisons' (p. 203). As a result, what cannot be measured has largely been discounted as unimportant or non-existent. Broadfoot asserts this discourse as 'profoundly' modernist and a 'product of an age committed to a belief in the power of science and rationality to lead to social and economic improvement', maintaining a link between rationality, modernist goals and the rise of educational assessment (p. 203). Educational assessment in Broadfoot's view, could be seen as a means by which the 'dominant rationality of corporate capitalist society' permeates into all aspects of schooling, and it is the influence of traditional educational assessment that in turn has shaped the current educational provision (p. 204).

Accountability, dependability of assessment information and competition drivers of formal education institutions have been assessment drivers in early childhood education too, though the overt goal of identifying and nurturing the elite can be identified more readily in schools and tertiary institutions than in early childhood. Early childhood education has been under increasing scrutiny for the past two decades since entering the Ministry of Education umbrella though it has not been subject to the same social and political influences as the compulsory sector (Mutch, 2003). In the informal, traditionally low status context of early childhood education the positivist influence on assessment has manifested in slightly different ways. Positivist influences are most evident in the sector's beliefs and practices around 'observation' and the emphasis put on 'objectivity'.

A culture of objectivity – assessment in early childhood education

The vocabulary associated with the positivist paradigm is that of scientific measurement, and because of this, what cannot be measured has largely been discounted as unimportant or non-existent in the positivist frame. Validity is associated with reliability in this view. A central assumption is that generalizability is desirable. Therefore, reliability goes hand-in-hand with validity. Theory and observations, which were used to test the theory in this view, are assumed to be independent and that the truth of observation is nonproblematic (Suppe, 1977). The positivist frame assumes social facts have an objective reality. This assumption is based on the belief that ‘we inhabit a relatively stable, uniform, and coherent world that can be measured, understood, and generalized about’ (Gay and Airasian, 1996, p. 9). This frame makes the assumptions that the world is made up of facts, and furthermore, that these facts can be scientifically observed and measured. Because these ‘facts’ can be observed and measured scientifically, they have an objective reality since they are not contaminated by subjective observation and interpretation. If something cannot be verified through direct observation and interpretation in this way, then it is not considered meaningful, as there is no objective reality and no generalizability.

For early childhood practitioners, observation and the positivist logic behind ‘objective observation’ have been central to the assessment of learning, particularly given that ‘tangible’ behaviours were the focus in traditional views of learning. In 1988 Anne Smith, a well-known New Zealand early childhood researcher, writer and teacher educator emphasised the importance of observing behaviour rather than characteristics or processes because of the measurability of behaviour.

Behaviour is something measurable that can be seen and heard by a variety of observers. Words used to describe our observations should refer to behaviour rather than to processes or characteristics which are thought responsible for behaviour. For example, instead of saying ‘Mary showed highly intelligent behaviour this morning’,

we should make statements like 'Mary attended her work for 90 per cent of the time during mathematics and successfully completed all the problems set'. (p. 35)

Smith's 1988 view of observation and what is worth observing is consistent with the positivist frame and exemplifies the culture of objectivity in early childhood assessment practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Smith likens the feeling of satisfaction gained by parents and teachers engaged in observation of children, to that of the 'excitement of discovery felt by scientists' (p. 33).

Just as Smith identifies parallels to scientific inquiry, I too see parallels between the way researchers approach the task of research and how teachers approach the task of assessment. The desire for objectivity in the positivist research mode, influences the assumptions about the position that should be taken when engaged in research. The positivist mode revolves around testing theory, making predictions, establishing facts and testing hypotheses (Gay and Airasian, 2000). The assumption is made that the 'outsider', someone looking in, is able to be more objective than an 'insider', and therefore, renders the study more valid. The positivist researcher assumes that they, as researcher, have to be objective and that they must be able to ensure reliability of data, and that the study should be easily replicated in order for it to be valid. Therefore, the positivist researcher will strive to reduce bias through detaching themselves from participants and by being impartial to the findings and participants to minimize 'contamination' of the results (Glesne and Peshkin, 2000). It is this desirability for detachment and impartiality that influences the researcher to select particular methods for data collection.

The position of the teacher in Smith's description could be seen as akin to that of a positivist researcher, an outsider looking in. The positivist mode assumes that the outsider's view (etic) is the only or the best way of gaining a true and accurate, objective, understanding of

the social phenomena. The social phenomenon in question for teachers is the child's learning and development as it occurs within an early childhood setting. In my student-beginning teacher view of assessment discussed in the previous chapter, the positivist influence on my thinking and actions associated with assessment are clearly recognisable. I played the role of researcher and the children were my subjects. I had been taught that specific aspects of children's learning and development, not all, only some, could be observed using specific techniques. To me the type of learning to be valued was specific, observable, measurable skills and knowledge, such as, pincer grip, appropriate use of language, left or right hand dominance. What I could not observe directly was not considered important to assess.

As indicated earlier in this chapter the positivist paradigm is currently the dominant view of assessment in early childhood education in this country. However, the introduction of *Te Whaariki* presents an alternative theoretical position for the sector, one that does not sit comfortably with the positivist position. Earlier in Chapter 2, I identified some of the tensions that are created for practitioners when they are pulled between the competing frames of traditional beliefs and the alternative frame of *Te Whaariki*. This paradigm flux is a particularly challenging situation for practitioners to be in, especially when practitioners fail to comprehend the alternative for what it is, as well as, those who define the expectations of those practitioners. A call for a shift in thinking about assessment came via research in the sector of assessment in this new context and from wider international attention to the tensions that develop for teachers and learners when the positivist position is assumed. The following section discusses some of these tensions both for teaching and learning in the wider context of education that have shaped the call for change in the early childhood sector here.

A call for change: establishing the need for a paradigm shift

As ideas and understandings about learning and teaching shift, educators are called to consider new ideas and understandings about the nature of assessment and its role in teaching and learning processes (Black and Wiliam, 2004; Broadfoot, 2000; Carr, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Claxton, 1995; Eisner, 1998; Fler, 2001; Gipps, 1994; Moss, 1992). Changes in the way assessment could be conducted are being considered for exactly the reasons Kuhn suggested any paradigm shift occurs: the originally accepted assessment paradigm no longer sufficiently satisfies the needs and interests of the assessment community, in this case, learners, their families and teachers. The reasons for this dissatisfaction are being discussed increasingly in assessment literature.

Broadfoot (2000) draws attention to the need to shift our thinking in relation to educational assessment. Broadfoot gives consideration to the key themes and motivations behind educational assessment as it has come to be understood in mainstream educational settings. Furthermore she argues that the obsession with measurement has 'constrained' education at the cost of student learning and achievement, of more fundamental forms of learning, and of teacher quality and professional development. Eisner (1998) expresses the need to move to more 'authentic' assessment (Wiggins, 1989, cited in Eisner, 1998), despite earlier attempts to address identified concerns about student learning in American schools. In doing so, he calls for assessment processes that are 'more complex and more closely aligned with life' (p. 138) than the individual performance measurement approaches taken by educators in an attempt to rectify concerns about student achievement.

Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, well-known assessment writers in the UK, also identify problems for both learners and teachers operating within traditional assessment practices. Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that learning and teaching is an interactive process, driven

by what happens in the classroom. Like Carr who positions assessment inside or as a part of the curriculum, Black and Wiliam urge for greater attention to supporting teachers to make best use of this teaching and learning interactive process as a platform for assessment, and in doing so, making assessment more formative. From their comprehensive study of international assessment research literature, they concluded that there is considerable evidence pointing to 'problems and short-comings' in current classroom assessment practices and called for urgent changes to the way assessment is practised and in how teachers are supported to understand their role in formative assessment.

During her exploration of literature around approaches to assessment, Carr (1998a, p. 7) found repeated discussion of the problem of positivist assessment in terms of what should be assessed in that there are '...no shortlist of all purpose skill and knowledge that predicts later achievement'. Carr also notes that 'sequences of skill and ability are not consistently confirmed by empirical studies' (p. 7).

Sally Lubec (1985) in the USA, and Marilyn Fleer and Jill Robins (2003) in Australia, in their discussions of the influence of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) on early childhood assessment practices, are critical of both the observation and documentation approach taken and the domains-based focus emphasizing important learning. Fleer and Robins point to this approach as being 'static, one-dimensional representations of complex interactional sequences' (p. 2) and challenge educators to move beyond Piagetian inspired concepts of the 'universality' of childhood and children. These researchers believe early childhood practitioners should look to sociocultural perspectives to frame understandings of learning and development and to guide assessment practices.

Fleer and Robins conducted a study comparing the analysis of observations of children² by 80 final year early childhood student teachers while on teaching placements. The student teachers used both traditional DAP frames and a sociocultural perspective to analyse their observations. They concluded that when the sociocultural frame was applied, the analyses were 'more critical, contextual, embedded and suggested different planning experiences' than if the traditional lens was used (2003, p. 17).

Earlier in 2001 Fleer identified a 'theoretical mismatch' between the sociocultural perspectives beginning to influence teaching and learning, and those influencing assessment practices. She called for a paradigm shift in assessment practice to achieve greater alignment with a sociocultural view:

The assessment paradigm is now ready to move from a view of focusing on individual thinking in social context to thinking of assessment as not just located in the individuals – but rather, as a dynamic organism which includes the education institution and its taken-for-granted practices, the cultural values and systems of knowledge which shape the children's world views, and the interactional processes, including mediation, between children, teachers and artifacts and systems. (2001, p. 13)

It may appear unfeasible to imagine a shift in thinking and practice given that the scientific discourse of the positivist position is not only entrenched in the early childhood sector but also within the fabric of wider educational and societal values. It may seem almost an impossible task to consider assessment and learning in new ways when we have, in a way, created this reality. However, the process of examining the assumptions we make about assessment and exploring alternative realities could be a liberating one as Broadfoot suggests:

It is profoundly to be hoped that the very awareness of the chains that bind our contemporary thinking will constitute the key to unlocking them, so that as a society we may gradually come to see that radically different perspectives are possible; that

² The analysis used was Barbara Rogoff's 3 lens of analysis (1995, 1998, 2003 cited Fleer and Robins, 2003)

we may begin to evince the beginnings of a vocabulary which is not dominated by the arrogance of scientific assumptions. Not only will this allow us to admit the limitations of assessment, it will also reveal important new perspectives about the business of learning more generally in which, formally or informally, assessment plays such a central part. (2000, p. 208)

The ‘casting off’ of the positivist chains Broadfoot refers to that have bound assessment in early childhood education, is possible when a sufficiently satisfying alternative is made visible. An alternative assessment paradigm for early childhood has been positioned through *Te Whaariki*. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Te Whaariki* has been positioned as a sociocultural framework that emphasizes:

The critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection.

(Ministry of Education, 1996:9)

To take a view of learning such as the view *Te Whaariki* describes above requires an equally dynamic and situated approach to assessing that learning. The positivist paradigm and its view of the world as being made up of observable, measurable discrete ‘facts’ that have an objective reality simply cannot accommodate, nor would it wish to, the multiple social and cultural realities and conceptualizations of learning and teaching that a sociocultural view embraces. The paradigm that can and willingly does accommodate a view such as that positioned by *Te Whaariki* is the interpretivist paradigm. In any discussion of the emergence of an alternative assessment paradigm for early childhood education in this country it is important to acknowledge the considerable contribution Margaret Carr has made to the sector in this respect. Given Carr’s focus on assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki* her work is essential and fundamental to a discussion of the interpretivist assessment paradigm.

The emergence of an interpretivist assessment paradigm in early childhood education

Carr's 'folk model' of assessment

Margaret Carr's assessment work symbolises the cutting edge of thinking around assessment in New Zealand early childhood education in a sociocultural framework, though she did not start out this way. As a Kindergarten teacher twenty years ago, Carr worked within the traditional positivist assessment paradigm she now describes as her 'folk model' of assessment, a term borrowed from David Olsen and Jerome Bruner (1996) and their work on what they term 'folk pedagogy'. Folk pedagogy can be described as:

...our everyday intuitive theories about learning and teaching, about what children's minds are like and how one might help them learn. They point out that these everyday intuitive theories and models reflect deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and assumptions. (Carr, 2001, p. 2)

Carr now describes her 'folk model' as carrying a set of assumptions about the *purpose* of assessment, *outcomes of interest*, *focus for intervention* or attention, *validity* of assessment data, *progress*, *procedures* and *value*. In this model Carr assumed that the *purpose* of assessment was to 'check against a short list of skills that describe 'competence' at school entry' (p. 3). With this *purpose* in mind these isolated 'school-orientated' skills were the learner *outcomes of interest* and her response as a teacher, or *focus of intervention*, was to foreground filling the gaps on this list. Her assumption was that *validity* could be established via objective observation and she understood *progress* in terms of hierarchies of skills. Carr says she used checklists as her *procedures* for assessing and saw the *value of this to practitioners* as being for 'surveillance by external agencies' (p. 3).

In her 1989 report to the Ministry of Education around the project *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Settings*, Carr introduced some of her thinking around an alternative approach to assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*. In this report Carr stated

that assessment in early childhood settings might be interpretive and qualitative for the same reasons a researcher might choose interpretive and qualitative procedures. She provided a set of reasons for why this would be appropriate:

- a) an interest in an inclusive unit of behaviour: the child in action or relationship, behaviour keyed into context
- b) children's behaviour in natural, not contrived, settings is of interest. Research indicates that the context is part of the interpretation: children will draw on different skills when the 'same' task is in different settings (Donaldson, 1978; Ceci and Bronfenbrenner, 1985; Berg and Calderone, 1994)
- c) understanding the learning environment from the children's perspectives is one of the topics of the investigation, on the recognized assumption that if the children's goals are not taken into account, the children will subvert the educational process in imaginative ways (Goodenow, 1992).

(Carr, 1998a, p. 10)

In her book *Assessment in Early Childhood: Learning Stories* (2001) Carr expands this thinking further and presents a new set of assumptions about assessment, a new paradigm for early childhood practitioners.

Reframing notions of valued learning and the role of assessment in learning

In reframing assessment for the early childhood sector Carr first defines the purpose of assessment to be about 'enhancing learning'. In her 20 year-old 'folk' view Carr (2001) said she made the assumption that:

....assessment sums up the child's knowledge or skills from a predetermined list. Harry Torrance and John Pryor have described this assumption as 'convergent' assessment. The alternative is 'divergent' assessment, which emphasizes the learner's understanding and is jointly accomplished by the teacher and the learner. (p. 2)

In employing 'convergent' assessments, Carr focused on 'fragmented and context-free school-orientated skills' (p 3), as the learner outcomes of interest. A 'divergent' view, however, rests on sociocultural theories that keep the child and their learning attached to its context, and by employing 'divergent' approaches, assessment will be more helpful in

developing understandings about learning for everyone involved, something Carr identifies that her 'folk' view didn't do.

Lev Vygotsky's theory of human development provides one of the bases for contemporary sociocultural views of teaching and learning. Vygotsky recognized the place of 'biological inheritance [...] cultural inheritance carried in the meanings of artifacts and practices in the individual's environment [...] and] the mutually constitutive relationship between individuals and the society in which they are members' (Wells, 1999, pp. 3 – 4) on learning, and therefore, schooling. In his discussion of Vygotsky's work in light of learning and development in a social context, Bruce McMillan (1991) puts it simply when he says:

...to understand human development we must give careful consideration both to individual learning and to the social context within which that learning occurs. We also see that interactions with adults and peers can be of strong and positive value in facilitating development. (p. 33)

Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework puts particular emphasis on the different contexts that impact on children's learning, and of interactions and relationships between these environments. *Content* of perception, motivation, thinking and learning are of central interest to Bronfenbrenner in his studies of human development 'rather than on the development of those processes themselves' (McMillan, 1991:37).

Because Carr's alternative view of learning is connected to context, it is that context and its connection to learning that Carr considers in her alternative view of learner *outcomes of interest*. Carr draws on James Werstch's notion of the learner as a 'learner in action' deriving from Lev Vygotsky's concept of 'mediated action' to frame her understanding of learner outcomes. Learner outcomes, Carr believes, are best understood by seeing knowledge and skills as 'attached' to social and cultural purposes, 'thereby blurring the division between the individual and the learning environment.' (p 5). In her alternative

view, Carr emphasizes *learning dispositions* as the learner outcomes of interest. She describes learning dispositions as:

situated learning strategies, plus motivation – participation repertoires from which a learner recognizes, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities. I also described them in terms of being ready, willing and able to participate in various ways: a combination of inclination, sensitivity to occasion and the relevant skill and knowledge. (p. 21)

Carr provides five domains of learning dispositions she see as desirable within the context of *Te Whaariki*. These are: *taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, communicating with others* and *taking responsibility*. It is in considering how to assess such learning, that Carr turns to examine her ‘folk’ assumptions about ‘validity’.

Reconstructing notions of ‘validity’

In Carr’s ‘folk model’ she had assumed ‘validity’ was best established through objective observation. Given her new view of learning-in-context, Carr’s traditional assumptions about ‘validity’ must be reconstructed. Carr explains how the issue of ‘validity’ must now be handled in light of her alternative view of learning:

In the alternative approach, however, assessment of the complex outcomes outlined above (learning dispositions, the learner-in-action and –in-relationships) is a central puzzle. To be valid, these assessments must go beyond anecdote, belief and hope. They will require interpreted observations, discussions and agreements. This process of assessment is like action research, with the teacher/researcher as part of the action. (2001, p. 13)

Earlier in my discussion of the positivist paradigm I wrote about Anne Smith’s 1988 view of teacher as a scientist and highlighted the parallels between the position of the teacher when assessing, and the researcher when researching. Carr makes a similar connection between research and assessment in her alternative view. However, she turns not to the

positivist position as Smith had. Rather, she calls on interpretative qualitative methods to assess the sort of learning she suggests should be the focus of educators.

Like assessment, research has experienced the emergence of the interpretivist paradigm and though alternative research views and methods have existed for centuries (Bogdan and Taylor, 1998) it has taken considerable time for these to gain credibility in the shadow of the positivist paradigm. The interpretivist holds a different world-view to that of the positivist and, therefore, a different understanding of the nature of reality and will often employ qualitative over quantitative methods for this reason. The interpretivist mode assumes that reality is socially constructed, is complex and evolving. Practitioners working within this mode will look to find meaning in context and perspective, given reality is assumed to be socially and culturally constructed, therefore, each person experiences the world differently. Furthermore, because there are many people with a variety of perspectives and multiple contexts, there are multiple realities, and certainty is not the goal of the interpretivist, unlike the positivist.

Though Carr uses the term 'validity' in her discussion of an alternative paradigm for early childhood assessment, the interpretivist position would reject the scientific discourse associated with the term 'validity' and instead turn to notions of 'authenticity'. Carr interchanges the use of the words 'validity' with 'accountability', a combination of 'plausibility' and 'trustability', and suggests that practitioners should keep data transparent, ensure that a range of interpretations are included, refine the constructs as they appear locally, and be clear about the connection between the learner and the environment (Carr, 2001).

The interpretivist assessor or researcher looks to find 'authenticity' through observations or data. Carr suggests that, in an early childhood setting, assessments should take notice of context from a variety of perspectives, by drawing on the voices or views of other teachers, parents, family members and the children themselves. Observations, combined with interpretation, discussions and agreements, will help to establish understanding about learner outcomes, teaching and about the learning community (Carr, 2001). Teachers will also need to become personally involved in assessments to gain or achieve a truer picture or understanding of learning in the settings they work in, thus helping them to construct more authentic assessments.

The interpretivist mode is founded on the desire to gain deep understandings of why things are the way they are and how people perceive these within context. This purpose, together with the assumption that reality is socially constructed, leads to the assumption that the insider's point of view (emic) is the most important position. Where the positivist mode positions the 'etic' (outsider) view, as the best way to view a situation or phenomenon, the interpretivist will not make that judgment. Instead the interpretivist mode sees the 'emic' view as the most important view. This is because it is believed it is the people inside the context of realities who can provide the best view of their own realities. Teachers in the positivist position will feel obliged to remove themselves when observing, distancing themselves from the learner in their desire to be objective. In an interpretivist paradigm, teachers will put themselves *into* the picture, make themselves and their beliefs visible and see themselves as shaping how learning is understood in their setting. Practitioners will also actively seek the view of the learner and their families in order to gain a 'truer' picture of learning.

Carr (2001) establishes a link between her original purpose of assessment and her audience. As a practitioner in the context of her 'folk model' she saw she could use her assessments for the purpose of accountability to *external* audiences, while in her alternative view she sees the value to practitioners as being for communicating with *internal* audiences she identifies as 'children, families, other staff and self' (p 3). With a new set of assumptions about the *purpose* and *value to practitioners* of assessment, Carr identifies tensions with her 'folk model' in terms of learner *outcomes of interest*, *focus of intervention*, *validity* and *progress*.

A tension with the 'folk' view of 'progress' develops because Carr's view of valued learning contrasts from her earlier Piagetian-influenced view. Carr's early view of progress was that learning could be understood as working toward specifically defined 'endpoints', and she used these 'endpoints' as markers to judge progress. In her discussion of an alternative view of progress, she illustrates multiple possible 'endpoints' and draws on the work of sociocultural writers such as, Lave and Wenger, Rogoff, Litowitz and Bronfenbrenner, in a search for a more fitting construct. Carr comes to define progress as 'increasingly complex participation' though admits at the time of writing her book, there were still 'few examples of early childhood practitioners translating these ideas into assessment practice' (2001, p. 17). Carr does, however, have many examples of practitioners exploring the alternative procedures she suggests for documenting assessments. Where previously checklists were used to quickly check learning against her defined list of 'school-orientated' knowledge and skills, Carr points to interpretive and qualitative approaches using narrative methods she calls *Learning Stories*.

Narrative as a useful method for assessing

Though Carr (2001) points to narrative as a useful method for approaching assessment, she also acknowledges that this approach is more time consuming than some traditional approaches. However, she maintains that narrative is 'more suited to translating situated and personal learning and is, therefore, a more holistic assessment procedure' (p. 62). Carr and Cowie (2003) refer to assessments as 'tools for social thinking and action' (p. 95). In early childhood education settings Cowie and Carr believe assessment should be for the purpose of 'mutual feedback and dialogue about learning' (p. 95). What this means in practice to Cowie and Carr is:

In early childhood education settings that take a 'distributed' view of curriculum and assessment, assessments will call on criteria that will be emergent, situated, student- or child-referenced and negotiated. The assessment process will acknowledge those occasions when children have their own sense of satisfaction in a task well done, using their own (frequently hidden) criteria. They will reflect the balances that have been struck between discussion and documentation, between participation and reification, in providing feedback to learners and their families and in suggesting what the next step might look like. And they will provide avenues for all participants to achieve considerable measure of access, ownership and legitimation. (p. 106)

One of the reasons narrative is useful as a method for communicating assessment is its accessibility to multiple audiences. Both documented and oral narratives can help to bridge the communication gap between teachers, children and parents, and allows each of these audiences into the process of assessing, thus supporting the notions of 'ownership' and 'legitimation' Carr and Cowie describe as desirable when a 'distributed' sociocultural view of learning is taken (p. 106). Carr uses the term *Learning Stories* to describe the type of documented assessment narratives she believes are useful in the early childhood context of *Te Whaariki*. *Learning Stories* are designed to combine observation, interpretation and analysis, with possible responses, and incorporate Carr's dispositional framework, a distillation of the five strands of *Te Whaariki* (Carr, 1998).

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience. They believe narrative is 'the best way of representing and understanding experience' (p18) particularly in terms of education and educational study.

According to Clandinin and Connelly, narrative in this context is:

'...a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.' (p20)

Though Clandinin and Connelly are particularly interested in narrative inquiry from a educational research perspective, their ideas can be applied equally to narrative used as a methodology for assessing in an early childhood setting.

Lamarque (1990) identified four common features of all kinds of narrative:

1. Narration of any kind involves the recounting and shaping of event;
2. Narration has an essential temporal dimension;
3. Narrative imposes structure; it connects as well as records; and,
4. Finally, for every narrative there is a narrator. (p. 131)

In applying Lamarque's four features to narrative assessments in early childhood education contexts one would expect these narratives to recount learning events in (or beyond) the early childhood setting. These would put a personal or group slant on the shape of the event through narrative itself or through interpretation and analysis of the learning, and through potential responses or next steps. These narrative assessments would be bound and defined by the time over which they were noticed by the narrator, being the teacher, parent, child or whanau, and would be representative of the sociocultural structure that the undertaking of assessment imposes on reality.

Because narrative imposes a way of thinking, a reality about children's learning and development or thinking about the child, assessment narratives will connect theory to practice and the past to the present. By this interweaving of the past (through previous

stories and stories revisited), with the present (the stories recorded and discussed now), these narratives also connect with the future for the children through the experiences, activities and strategies planned, as well as through revisiting stories. Every story has a narrator, so the voice of the storyteller will be made obvious, rather than hidden as it is in positivist approaches. Consideration will also be given to whose voice the story represents.

Carr's work has presented a way forward for assessment practice in early childhood education. Though Carr's *Learning Stories* have been interpreted in many different and unintended ways both locally and internationally, from my experience as an early childhood professional development facilitator, when *Learning Stories* are incorporated as intended into the context of the interpretivist paradigm, their use in early childhood, as well as school settings, shifts views, motivates and inspires teaching and learning in ways that traditional approaches have not done for teachers, children and their families. I suggest that these powerful and positive consequences on learning communities are not only because the members of these communities 'do' *Learning Stories* but also, and more importantly, it is that the teachers in these settings have, as Carr did, identified the traditional positivist assumptions embedded in their training, in their practice and experiences within the sector and have made genuine attempts to challenge these assumptions and reconstruct new assumptions. It is when this challenge is undertaken that it may be possible for teachers to construct new realities for assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*.

Conclusion

The interpretivist paradigm presents a legitimate alternative to traditional positivist beliefs and practices of an era pre-*Te Whaariki*. The positivist approach to assessment that dominates the sector leads practitioners away from the philosophy of *Te Whaariki* and does little to support contemporary sociocultural views of learning and development or teaching

and learning. There is ample literature to support a change in assessment practice and no better place to start than within a sector that not only has relative freedom to explore possible alternatives but also has a curriculum that supports such exploration.

The message for the early childhood education sector in this country is that it is time to take on a new view, with new purposes and methods for assessing. The door has been opened for practitioners to enter into a new assessment paradigm. However, the positivist grip on the sector is a strong one, and as Kuhn theorized, a true shift may not be possible. But what are the consequences for teachers working in a sector where two competing paradigms are effectively being 'played out' through the policy documents and resources intended to guide their assessment practice? The following chapter discusses a study of a team of early childhood teachers as they go about 'doing' assessment in their setting. I do not expect this study to answer the question posed above but I do hope to gain insights into these teachers' realities of assessment in the context of *Te Whaariki*.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes a qualitative study designed to find out about the use of narrative assessments by teachers in an early childhood education setting. Specifically this study is concerned with exploring the question: *How do teachers in an early childhood setting use narrative assessment to make decisions about the programme provided for the children they work with?*

Qualitative research is most often guided by interpretivist or phenomenological theoretical perspectives as this study is, and though there are subtle differences in the viewpoints and approaches interpretivist researchers take, they are linked by their rejection of positivist beliefs about human behaviour (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003, Glesne & Peshkin 1992). Rather than believing human behaviour is ‘governed by general, universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities’ (Cohen et. al., 2003) as the positivists do, interpretivists would agree that:

...the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated; individuals’ behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference: understanding of individuals’ interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside.’ (Cohen, et al., 2003, p. 19).

It is these differing assumptions about the nature of the world (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), that lead the qualitative researcher to employ methods aimed to explore the participants’ views and their experiences of the world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). I was interested in exploring the experiences, ideas, motives, practices and beliefs of a team of early childhood teachers as they understood assessment and as they saw their own assessment practices at an early childhood centre. Therefore, I used a range of data collection methods designed to

delve 'inside' the participants' views of their assessment practices and what shaped and influenced these views.

By the very nature of its theoretical influences, qualitative research is a subjective undertaking (Taylor & Bogdan, 2003) and is accepted as an evolving process. It is the flexibility of this approach that allowed for the design and data collection processes of this project to evolve as ideas and frameworks emerged from the data. Though my original research question provided the focus of this study, the specifics of the study evolved as I began my fieldwork, and as a result, the project moved and shifted somewhat from my original preconceived image (Taylor & Bogdan, 2003).

I acknowledge that as a researcher involved in a setting for a relatively short time period (despite the participants' acceptance of my role in the centre and their welcoming approach), I remained largely an outsider at the centre. My attempts to develop a shared frame of reference (Cohen et al., 2003) with the participant teachers are subject to my own embedded views of assessment and experiences from my own time as a teacher and currently as a professional development facilitator in the early childhood sector. In an attempt to understand my own assumptions and to acknowledge these I have at times included my own personal reflections and stories in this report.

Data collection for my study included the collection of relevant documentation (both newly developed and historical), participant observation, video observation, unstructured individual and group interviews and group workshops. Field notes, reflections and ongoing interpretation and analysis were documented in my own research journal. Though there are advantages and disadvantages of conducting group interviews (Watts & Ebbutt 1987, cited Cohen et al., 2003), team teaching is characteristic of the early childhood sector. Because of

this, I felt it was important to reflect the sector's culture of a group perspective, hence I used group interviews and workshops in combination with individual interviews. The mix of individual and group interviews and workshops also allowed me to get to know each of the teachers, and for them to get to know me, as well as understand how they, worked together as a group.

Participant observation provided the opportunity to consider the processes and procedures employed by the participant teachers at team meetings as they went about discussing what they noticed about children and decided what they might do next. Collecting existing documentation provided not only an historical perspective of practices at the centre but philosophical beliefs and interpretations of current Ministry of Education mandates. Any documentation generated during the course of this study also provided examples of perspectives and practices in action.

Selecting an early childhood centre

When first considering where this study might take place, a number of questions came to mind: *What type and character of early childhood centre should I approach? Would there be limitations if I chose to study a centre I had already supported through my work as a professional development facilitator? Would the sector's reputation of high staff turnover hinder this study? Would I find a centre that could accommodate my needs for extra meetings and non-contact time with staff? What size centre could fit the scope of this project? Could I rely on the centre's definition of narrative assessment? How might I protect the centre's identity in such a close-knit early childhood community?*

After much deliberation I concluded that the setting for this project should be a mainstream early childhood centre of a moderate size, situated in Christchurch. The teaching team of the

centre would be the participants of the study and their involvement in this project would need to be well supported by management. Although there is a range of services that could be described as early childhood centres, I chose a centre based on the following criteria:

1. The centre would be deemed to be an Education and Care Centre¹ by Ministry of Education definition. I work most commonly with this type of service in professional development and these settings represent the majority of service type in Aotearoa New Zealand. By working within the most common type of environment I felt the conclusions generated from this study are more likely to be of interest to those working with and within the broad spectrum of services;
2. Teachers would need sufficient staff and planning meeting provision and regular non-contact time, to ensure I would have sufficient time to meet with the participants; and,
3. The centre would have assessment practices in place and would use narrative (stories) to describe children's learning.

Though I required only one centre for the project I constructed a short list of early childhood centres I believed met my criteria. I then considered any possible tensions between my role as a professional development facilitator and a possible researcher in the setting. In most situations I eliminated centres from this list because of the possibility that I would be required to work with them in the coming year in a professional development capacity. Others were eliminated because of recent staff turn-over or because I was aware of other commitments on the centre's time and resources, such as qualification upgrades. Eventually, my list was reduced to two possible centres. I approached the head teachers of these settings

¹ Education and Care Centres Provide sessional, all-day, or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age. They may be privately owned, non-profit making, or operated as an adjunct to the main purpose of a business or organisation.

to discuss their willingness to be involved in the project. After some consideration, one confirmed its desire to be involved, while the other declined due to other commitments. I then formally invited the available centre to participate in this project, which was confirmed in writing by the centre manager several days later.

A community centre licensed for both over two year olds and under two year olds, the participant centre draws from a wide community and met all of my criteria. Teachers have up to five hours non-contact time each per week and two hours for staff planning meetings per fortnight. Staff turnover is low and the centre described part of their assessment as 'Learning Stories'². Management of the centre was prepared to accommodate my requirements and held the attitude that being involved in such a study would benefit the centre. I had not worked with the current teachers or management from the participant centre in professional development nor was I likely to in the near future.

Ethics

Following approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury and consent from management for the centre to participate, I attended a staff meeting in July 2003 to introduce myself to the teaching staff and to explain my project. This meeting provided the opportunity to begin establishing a relationship with the participants, for them to ask questions about my intentions and to ease some of their anxieties about sharing their work and thoughts with a researcher.

I had included the use of video recordings on the project information and consent forms as per my ethics application and several of the teachers were uneasy about the use of video to record events they were part of. At this time I had not planned to use video, rather I had

² See Chapters 1 and 2 for explanation of the term *Learning Stories*.

included the use of video in case I felt I needed to use this medium. Anxiety around the use of video is often raised as an issue in research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), and after some discussion about this issue it was agreed we would discuss this again should I decide use of video be required. Together we discussed the detail contained on the consent forms and information sheet provided. (See Appendix A for samples of consent forms and information sheets for teachers.) All members of the teaching team completed a consent form, including giving consent for the use of video, following this meeting.

Consent was also required from parents as assessment and planning documentation for their children was to be used in the study. This documentation included teacher and/or parent and child comments/assessments, photos and children's work. I displayed notices in prominent places around the centre to draw the parents' attention to the project and my desire to collect consent from them for accessing documentation about their child or children. I provided consent forms and information sheets for all parents of children attending the centre. (See Appendix B for samples of consent forms and information sheets for parents). The centre manager took responsibility for ensuring that parents completed consent forms and these were forwarded to me as they were gathered. During the parental consent process I started interviewing teachers. Where consent was yet to be gained, teachers protected the identity of children from me. I did not collect nor document information about children until parental consent was given. Consent forms were supplied to all newly enrolling parents during the course of the project.

Participants

All staff with teaching responsibilities were invited to participate in the study. This included the manager of the centre who worked with the children for short periods during the day. All staff chose to participate without restriction. However, not all staff were able to

participate in all group interviews or workshops due to illness or other commitments. For the majority of this study there were 9 participants. No staff left the centre during this study, although an additional teacher was employed towards the end of the second phase of data collection. This teacher's contributions from the time of her employment were included.

As with most early childhood services all teaching staff, including the centre manager were women. Two of the staff members were supervisors, responsible for leading the teachers in the 'under two' or 'over two' areas of the centre. Though some members of the teaching team did not yet hold a teaching qualification, I will only make a distinction between 'trained' and 'in-training' at points where this difference may influence the findings of this study. From hereon I will refer to the participants of this project as 'teachers', including the manager when she is acting in a teaching role.

The participant teaching group was diverse in its makeup. The teaching experience of the group ranged from being a new graduate in her first months of teaching to having worked in the sector for 18 years (gaining a teaching qualification in recent years). Though most of the teachers were trained at the time of this study, most had gained their qualifications between 1999 and 2003. Teachers had been employed at the centre for between several months to 10 years. Seven of the staff had been working at the centre for two years or less. All teachers were, at the time of the study either trained (8) or in training (2). Six of the team held a Diploma of Teaching (ECE), one of which was gained through Equivalence, while another teacher held a Diploma of Kindergarten Teaching. Two of the teachers with a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) also held a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning. One teacher held a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning, while another held a Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE). Of the two teachers in training, one was in her first year, the other in her third and final year of centre-based training.

Sources of Data Collection

The data collection of this project was arranged in two phases spanning a seven-month period during early August 2003 and mid February 2004. The first phase of data collection ran between early August until early October 2003. Phase two began in mid November 2003 and ended mid February 2004. Data collection in phase one focused around gathering a broad range of information that would provide foundation information from the centre and Data was related to *assessment* and described what was understood as *assessment* at the centre. It was planned that phase one would help to narrow the focus of the project for phase two. Group and individual interviews and workshops with the teaching team were scheduled around other team commitments. Sometimes this meant I was provided a time slot at meetings, at other times additional meeting times were arranged.

Throughout the data gathering phases I was interpreting and analysing the data. However, this was less formal than the means by which I did this at the end of each of the two data collection phases. Further discussion about data analysis is featured later in this chapter and the next.

Reflective Journal

The use of a reflective journal proved to be an invaluable tool for me during the course of this project. Though its initial use was a case of trial-and-error, once I found a method that worked well for me, I recorded my observations and reflections in this journal during the course of the project. The recordings included descriptions from when observing participants, notes during interviews, as well as my initial thoughts and interpretations following interviews and workshops or short conversations held with teachers during visits to the centre that were not audio recorded (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It was here that I also

stored additional material I collected from outside of the study setting, that I felt held relevance to my project. As suggested by Bogdan and Taylor (1998), I found drawing diagrams particularly useful in helping me to present and develop my ideas as they emerged.

Regularly, every two to three weeks, I would return to my journal entries and add further reflections, interpretations and analysis on the page opposite, all the while searching for possible emerging themes. All entries were dated and as I layered my analyses I added post-it notes and additional pages. Throughout the journaling process and other collection of data I realized that my initial views and assumptions about the project were indeed shifting as suggested in much of the literature I had read in relation to qualitative research. I have returned to my journal many, many times during the course of the study, particularly during the analysis of other data and during the writing of this dissertation both to add more entries, to track my newly emerging ideas and thinking, and to recall events.

Collection of Existing Information

This phase began in August 2003, and as discussed previously, included the gathering of material relating in some way to assessment practices that could be found in existing databases at the centre. Taylor and Bogdan (1980, cited Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), during discussion of interpretation of official documentation during a study they conducted of mental health institutions, drew attention to official documentation of all institutions as a site of interest for researchers. It is official documents that Taylor and Bogdan claim are sources of new understandings but should be:

...interpreted in terms of presenting a preferred image of institutions and managing the impressions of external publics upon whom they depend for their existence.

(1998, p. 130)

I photocopied group and individual planning forms as far back as the beginning of 2003, relevant policies and the centre's philosophy statement. I had hoped to copy staff meeting minutes but found these were not recorded at the centre. In addition, I asked to copy pages from the *shared diary* kept by the teachers. However, this was not made available to me. The *shared diary* was used by teachers to record notes about what they had noticed during the day, it was used as a communication tool between teachers and as a means of storage of information that might later be transferred or used in children's profile books. In hindsight, I believe that I probably asked for these pages too early on in the project. I'm not sure that the teacher I asked felt that she trusted me fully at that stage or perhaps could not see why I might want these records. Though I discussed these records again with this teacher and other members of the team, they did not appear to want me to access these. So I did not pursue the issue further. I also accessed an Education Review Office (ERO) report about the centre from the ERO website. I read this material thoroughly so it was familiar though did not begin a more formalised process of analysis as such until the end of the phase. I did, however, document my initial interpretations and impressions about the content of this material in my journal.

Group Interviews

Several weeks after the collection of existing information I conducted a group semi-structured session with all of the participants during an evening at the centre. I audio recorded this interview and took field notes. The time taken in this interview had been allocated from the staff meeting and was limited to one hour. I had hoped to conduct two group interviews during two staff meeting slots. However, this was not possible given other commitments on the centre so I was limited to one session, requiring me to reduce the time spent on each topic. The topics for discussion at this interview were relatively broad. I

wanted to gain a view of the many possible influences on assessment at the centre. Topics discussed included:

- The centre and individual teachers' philosophies;
- Their beliefs about young children and what their experiences should be;
- Their (teachers') role and how they viewed themselves,
- The role of parents;
- How they viewed the early childhood sector; and,
- What they understood assessment to be.

I drafted some possible questions to prompt discussion but wanted the interview to be free flowing and relatively open-ended, allowing the participants to determine the course of discussion (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). (See Appendix C for list of initial questions) When I felt this discussion slowed or had moved from the topics of my interest I would introduce a new question. Unfortunately, the time allocated was not sufficient and I was forced to halt discussion despite the participants' enthusiasm. Although time was limited the group did discuss, to some degree, each of the topics I hoped would be covered in this session. If time had allowed I would have liked the group to share with me their views around the role of parents further, as this topic was not discussed to the depth of the other topics. Following this interview I recorded my reflections about what was shared in my journal and possible emerging themes that I had become aware of.

Individual Interviews

Over the following two weeks I interviewed each teacher individually during her non-contact time. As with the group interview, these interviews were semi-structured and audio recorded. The aim of conducting these interviews was to clarify individual practices and beliefs. I asked similar questions of each teacher while allowing them to take the lead in discussion and to set the direction. I asked teachers to bring with them examples of the

records they were keeping of children's learning to share while talking with me. These records took the form of profile books, examples of children's work and digital, printed photographs yet to be added to these books. Each interview was between 20 and 40 minutes in duration. I took brief notes during these interviews, being careful not to distract the teacher I was interviewing, and recorded my reflections in my journal on what was shared afterwards. These reflections included my initial interpretations and possible emerging themes. Sometimes comments were made in discussion after the tape-recorder was switched off. After requesting permission from the participant, I would note these in my journal.

Observation of Staff Planning Meetings

During September 2003 I attended a staff meeting to observe the team discussion and decision-making in action. This meeting included a period of time where the whole teaching group discussed general business together before splitting into 'under two' and 'over two' year-old teaching groups. Separately these teams of teachers discussed individual children and planned the programme. I audio recorded both groups of teachers and spent time observing each group in turn over a one and a half hour period and recorded field notes. At the conclusion of the meeting I recorded my reflections about what I had observed.

Data Analysis: Phase 1

Though I write about the data analysis as separate phases, this should not be taken to say at the time of writing this dissertation, nor when I started gathering data for phase two, that I saw the analysis of these two phases as distinct or linear. From the moment I started gathering data in phase two I returned to thinking about the data collected in phase one with my originally identified findings, and these undoubtedly shaped my analysis of the phase 2 data. There are various recognized approaches to analysis of qualitative data (e.g. Glaser and Strauss' *Grounded Theory Approach*, Znaniecki's *Analytical Induction*) with varying

degrees of complication. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stress that data analysis is an, 'on-going process of discovery – identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions' (p. 141). They suggest that in a qualitative project such as this, 'data collection and analysis go hand in hand' (p. 141).

When I had collected all relevant data for phase one, I began to transcribe the audiotape recordings from both sets of interviews and the team planning meeting. Participant teachers were provided with the opportunity to read transcripts of interviews they participated in and make further comments or amendments if desired.

After reading and re-reading my data I began analysing the data for words, phrases and themes, noting these in the page margin that would eventually provide me with categories. In the case of video footage, in addition to transcribing the audio recordings, I watched the video footage and while doing so I took written notes of the words, phrases and themes I noticed. To do the analysis well, required me to watch this footage several times to ensure I was familiar with the content and themes as the audio transcripts did not provide enough detail of the context of documentation to the discussion. At times I explored possible typologies, diagrams and propositions or generalised statements that reflected what I was finding from the data. I collated lists of words and phrases and eventually developed categories under which these could be grouped. I return to discussion of the findings from my initial analysis of the phase one data in the following chapter.

Additional Sources of Data Collected in Phase 2

I started phase 2 in November 2004 and the focus of phase two was determined following the initial analysis of data gathered in phase 1. Based on my initial findings from the first phase of the data collection, I wanted to shift my emphasis to focusing more closely on teachers' beliefs about their assessment practices. In this phase I wanted to use data with the

group for two reasons: 1) engage them on their beliefs; and, 2) engage them on their beliefs about their practice.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) in their discussion of pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development, identify group process and the use of text and imagery as powerful means for exploring and reflecting on assumptions about knowledge, practice and educational purpose in educational institutions. In considering these ideas for this research project I developed two premise workshops for the participant teachers. The approach taken in these workshops were an adaptation of a technique developed by Howard Richards (1985). I hoped that re-presenting some of the central premises that emerged from the data of phase one back to the participant teachers, through text, and later in conjunction with video footage for their practice, would provide further insights into their realities and their knowledge, practice and purposes. In qualitative research the use of video is recognised as a legitimate means of gathering data (Archer, 1997; Ball & Smith, 1992; Gold, 1997 a, b; Harper, 1997, Suchar, 1997; cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and there are growing numbers of researchers using video footage of participants in action as a reflection tool aimed at gaining insights into participants' perspectives of themselves and their actions in educational research. I chose to use this approach because:

1. I wanted to gain further insights into the role of assessment at the centre, by capturing the team decision-making processes;
2. I wanted to better understand how the team viewed their own practices; and,
3. I wanted to ensure I captured as much of the detail of the two groups while they worked in separate spaces at the same time.

As previously stated, the participants had initially been uneasy about me video recording their practice. However, when I approached the teachers about this at the start of phase 2, they were happy for me to video their staff meetings. The team had seemingly grown more

comfortable with me working with them, and with participating in the research. By the time I asked to introduce video recording of their team meetings, the teachers were more accepting of this sometimes intrusive form of data collection. I assured them that I would not allow any other person to view the tapes and that I would return these to them when my study was complete.

Initial Premise workshops

To begin phase 2 of the data collection I facilitated a 45-minute *premise workshop* with the teaching team. The aim of this workshop was to engage the group of participant teachers with the data. In the initial workshop this would revolve around focusing the group on thinking about and discussing their beliefs. I had planned to discuss with the group, as many key statements as possible in the time available, allowing the participant group to clarify, alter and/or rewrite these statements, until as a group, they were satisfied that these represented their beliefs and practices. These statements or premises were either direct quotes from the teachers that were similar, or carried a theme common to what other members of the participant group had expressed during phase one of the project, or they were combinations of statements made by participants that I had crafted into a premise.

Using large sheets of paper and ensuring every member of the participant group was able to see, I wrote out the first premise. I then read this to the group and asked them if they felt this statement represented their beliefs and practices at the centre. As they discussed what was presented I asked them if they would they like me to alter the statement in any way. As they identified changes they would like made, I altered the wording taking note of the order of changes and read out the altered premise to them. I continued to re-write and read out the evolving statement to the group, taking note of the order and detail of the alteration, until such point that everyone in the group felt comfortable with what was presented. I then

repeated this same process with further statements until we had used all the time available. By the end of this session we had worked through three of the six premises I had selected in total. This session took longer than expected and because we were limited by time we were unable to work through the remaining three premises. Prior to this session I had considered which of the six premises were of most interest to me. On the evening of the premise workshop, and as I realized time would be limited, I had prioritized three of the premises to work through. I ranked these premises to reflect my priorities. The three premises I selected were:

1. When it comes to planning we use what we carry around in our heads about children to make decisions about what we do next.
2. We each have our own ways of doing the Learning Story Books. We do these individually and plan and evaluate programmes as a team.
3. The Learning Story books are for parents and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here.

The first premise was a statement made by one of the teachers during an individual interview and was similar to what other teachers had also said. Premises two and three were the most common statements (with slight wording variations) that the participants had made during individual interviews. The third was also shared in various ways by several of the participants at individual interviews again in slightly different ways. As with all other sessions with the participants, discussion was audio recorded and I transcribed this at a later time.

Video recording of planning meetings

Teachers at the participant centre meet each fortnight to plan and evaluate the centre's under two and over two programmes for children. During these meetings there is always shared meal followed by general business, before the group split into the two age group teaching teams to either plan and/or evaluate the planned programmes. In December 2003 and February 2004 I video-recorded staff meetings, capturing both the planning and evaluation practices of each teaching group as they went about their regular process. I video recorded four meetings in total: one 'planning' meeting of both the under two team and the over two team and one 'evaluation' meeting of both teams. To ensure I could clearly hear what the groups were discussing I also audio recorded these meetings.

Due to staff illness the second video sessions required rescheduling and due to other commitments I was not present during the entire video recording of this meeting. Not all members of the teaching team were able to attend each of the meetings due to illness and other commitments. This absenteeism of staff was inevitable, and not uncommon at the centre, given the number of staff employed there. Therefore, I did not feel these absences compromised the study. Each teaching group met for approximately one and a half hours per meeting. The primary purpose of video recording these sessions was for use at the follow-up premise workshop. The secondary purpose was for me to be able to observe team meetings more closely.

Follow-up premise workshop

From the video footage of the previous meetings I selected six short sequences of video, three for each teaching group that showed the following:

1. Teachers talking about children;

2. Teachers making decisions about what to implement for children in the programme; and,
3. The physical context of the discussion including the wide view of the table or floor area the teachers were seated around, which showed clearly what was recorded at the time and the resources present and available to teachers.

At this 2-hour long meeting I explained to the group that I wanted them to talk about and reflect on their practice using examples of footage of their staff meetings. I asked that they watch the video footage and then talk about what they noticed about their practice before reviewing the premise statements we had worked on previously. As with previous group discussions I wanted this session to be free flowing and directed mainly by the participants' ideas and priorities. I had developed a few open-ended questions to prompt the group when necessary but otherwise allowed them to take the lead. To start discussion I asked them to describe what they saw or noticed about what they were doing in the video footage. I audio recorded the discussion while also taking notes.

I then shifted their focus to the three key premises they worked on at the first premise workshop. On a large piece of paper I presented them with the first original premise and read this to the group. I then showed and read them the final version of this following their alterations made at the previous workshop. I asked them if they still felt these represented their practice accurately, or whether since watching the video footage, and our discussion, they wanted to discuss and/or alter this statement in any way. I noted any changes in order and recorded these on the paper, reading each alteration to the group as these occurred, until the group said they were satisfied with what was written. I then repeated this exercise with the remaining two premises.

Data analysis: phase 2

After I had collected all relevant data for phase two, I began a similar process of transcribing and analysis as used in phase one. After spending several weeks working on the data analysis of phase two, I was forced to take a break from the project due to the impending birth of my first child. I took several months leave from late June until late November 2004. Upon returning to the project I found I had lost touch with the data and needed to spend time focusing on this again. This involved revisiting the data including my coding categories, how I coded the data and some of the ideas I had previously identified. From late December until the completion of this written report I continued to revisit and reflect on the data as I constructed each chapter.

Chapter 4

The findings and discussion of phase one data

Making sense of the data: discerning themes

Following my initial analysis of the data, I created nine categories to help me discern the emerging themes. These categories were: *Types of assessment, rules about assessment, documentation for accountability, documentation to support relationships, assessment audiences, uses of assessments, systems and structures of assessment, working as a team and threats to assessment*. However, I found this number of themes unhelpful in assisting me in framing my understanding or helping me to establish a clear focus for the next phase of data collection. After further thinking and reflection on the data I felt many of these categories could be merged as they were more closely connected than I had originally seen them to be. I returned to this task over several days and eventually through this process I came to refine my original categories to establish two central themes that I believe best represented the findings from analysis of the data. These themes are: 1) *the meaning of assessment*, and 2) *assessment as contributing to practice*.

The meaning of assessment

I identified *the meaning of assessment* as a central theme in phase one for several reasons. Firstly, it became clear through discussion and documents from the centre, that the teachers saw ‘assessment’ as part of the *planning cycle* and that the implementation of this planning cycle was considered an important element of the teachers’ work. Secondly, teachers frequently referred to the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ nature of their work in discussions of assessment, thus establishing a hierarchical order for not only each part of their assessment related practice, but also for assessment tools. And thirdly, teachers had a multi-layered set

of criteria to evaluate the formality or informality of the different aspects of their assessment practice.

The ways teachers make meaning of assessment

I was interested to find out what the teachers identified assessment to be early on in the project, as I felt this would be inherently connected to the actions teachers take and decisions they make around assessment practice. When asked in the group interview what the term ‘assessment’ means to them, this was first referred to in terms of either *teachers evaluating and assessing their own practice*, or *evaluation of the programme*. When asked specifically about what does assessment mean to them in relation to *children’s learning*, the teachers first spoke of assessment as part of the ‘formal’ planning cycle, and secondly, as an ‘informal’ practice at the centre. It became evident to me at this point that the teachers had two levels of meaning for assessment: formal and informal, and I began to think of the ‘planning cycle’ they referred to as a layer of their practice that assessment is sited within.

Susan, a teacher who worked in the preschool, the over 2 area of the centre, described how assessment was connected to this ‘planning cycle’:

We have the assessment because we’re pulling, we’re brainstorming as a starting point for our child and that’s the first part of, we do follow page 30 of DOPs.

(Susan)

In Chapter 2 I discussed the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (1996) or *DOPs* and the expectations set out in the *DOPs* in relation to assessment in the sector. I highlighted *DOP 3* in particular and discussed the connection between this *DOP* and the example of a cyclical illustration provided in *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998), the document designed by the Ministry of Education to support the

implementation of the *DOPs*. Above Susan refers to ‘page 30 of *DOPs*’ indicating to me that the ‘planning cycle’ the teachers refer to, is the one presented on page 30 of *Quality in Action*. Though the *DOPs* are legislation and *Quality in Action* is only a supporting document it is clear from Susan’s comments that she sees the *DOPs* and *Quality in Action* as one and the same. This planning cycle was discussed as a continual, formal process and something the teachers were obliged to do. The formality attached to implementing the planning cycle, and the perceived obligation to do so, came from the level of importance put on this cycle in their training and because they considered it a requirement of the Ministry of Education:

Susan – *Because it’s a Ministry directive. That’s what I’m paid to do. What I’m paid to do is to do that. I’ve worked in a centre where we weren’t doing that and we got pulled into line. We weren’t able to articulate it.*

Miranda – *I think that picture that locks people’s, people’s way of thinking into this way. It locks you in, that page 30. It locks you in.*

Rachel – *Like it’s a cycle of planning, evaluation and assessment, planning, evaluation, assessment...*

Emma - *well that’s the training we’ve had as teachers has gone, right this is how you do it. So the background for us to that, it’s coming from our training.*

Susan also described ‘page 30’ as legislation that ‘she knew off by heart’. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *DOPs* (1996), is legislation that establishes Government goals for all chartered early childhood education services. Services are required to implement these goals but these are intended to be open to interpretation, allowing services to overlay their own

service character in realising these goals. Though *Quality in Action* is a supporting resource and not intended to be prescriptive, it is obvious from teachers' responses that it was seen as legislation, and therefore, as required of them. Although the teachers may have understood this cycle as a 'have to', they considered it of value and spoke positively about the cycle as an approach.

The team was clear that the cycle was useful to them, as it provided direction and clarity around how to do planning, evaluation and assessment. Emma, a trained early childhood teacher, described the cycle as a type of 'recipe' that helped people get the formal assessment 'right'. Getting it 'right' was important to several of the teachers and this was often connected to external accountability. For example, Susan described how she was 'pulled into line' for not doing or being able to articulate the planning cycle in a previous work place. Emma viewed the *DOPs* as broad and open to interpretation, while she saw the cycle presented in *Quality in Action* as prescriptive. She understood that the group was not required to implement this cycle but said it was very challenging to move beyond the 'recipe'. In talking about any possible alternatives to the cycle she retained the cyclical approach as the starting point from which it may be possible to move. Emma identified confidence, and the ability to articulate an alternative process or rationale, in particular to outsiders, such as the Education Review Office, as two prerequisites if you were to attempt to 'move beyond the recipe'.

I think that people need recipes too, as guidelines [...] because that means people will hopefully mean they are doing it right, and when they become a lot more confident they might start changing that recipe to what suits them. When they can confidently articulate to who ever is going to come in and say 'show me what you do', when ERO come out or whatever, um that they can confidently back that up and be confident in what they are doing and say [...]

it's not that exactly, that recipe but I understand that recipe well enough to come out of that recipe and change it, [...] I think that there's a lot of people who aren't at that stage and just want keep trucking on with that, just truck on with that and go 'oh well that's achieving what we need to achieve. [...] If I get out of that then I have to justify it more, well that could be scary. Can I justify that? Can I articulate that enough? [...] There are a lot of early childhood people that just can't articulate themselves clearly enough [...]

(Emma)

Though the team referred to 'the cycle' a great deal in their discussions as 'formal', they felt it had various entry points and was not strictly followed in the 'informal' day-to-day practice with children. However, they felt that during their 'informal' day-to-day interactions with children the cycle remained an influence. As discussed in the group interview:

Kate – *Yeah, and see I don't think it always does go around that cycle because it can start anywhere in that cycle. Like if there is spontaneous play and something happened we'll think, well we'll go and plan something from that. And then you do that and after you've done that, then you assess, you evaluate that. So it's not always that, do this, then this.*

Emma – *Yeah I agree.*

Rachel – *On a day-to-day basis. That might be the way it goes for individual objectives but the day-to-day it can start anywhere.*

Susan – *You're still doing the same thing though. You're still doing the same perpetual, cyclical thing.*

Emma – *I don't think a lot of people wouldn't understand [that diagram as] a possible cycle and where they can come in and out. So page 30 is probably a good thing for illustrating that for people, for the formal.*

Rachel – *Yeah. That's for the formal stuff, but the informal day-to-day stuff we don't necessarily follow that cycle, it might not even get down to paper.*

The teachers seemed to have two over-arching criteria of meaning, the first being teaching practice associated with the cycle, the formal, and secondly, teaching practice that sits outside of the cycle, the informal, being day-to-day spontaneous interactions they have with children. These day-to-day spontaneous teaching and learning interactions, I suggest, is a second layer of practice assessment sited within at the centre.

The teachers met fortnightly at planning meetings to discuss and document information in relation to the planning cycle, and I wondered if perhaps team discussion might have been considered one of the criteria for 'formal' but it was not. Rather, it is what was *written down* that was important. Rachel referred to the informal as something that 'might not even get down on paper' and in an explanation to me in the group interview, she identified documentation as being part of the 'formal' assessment:

Me - *So what makes something formal or informal? How do you distinguish what's informal and formal?*

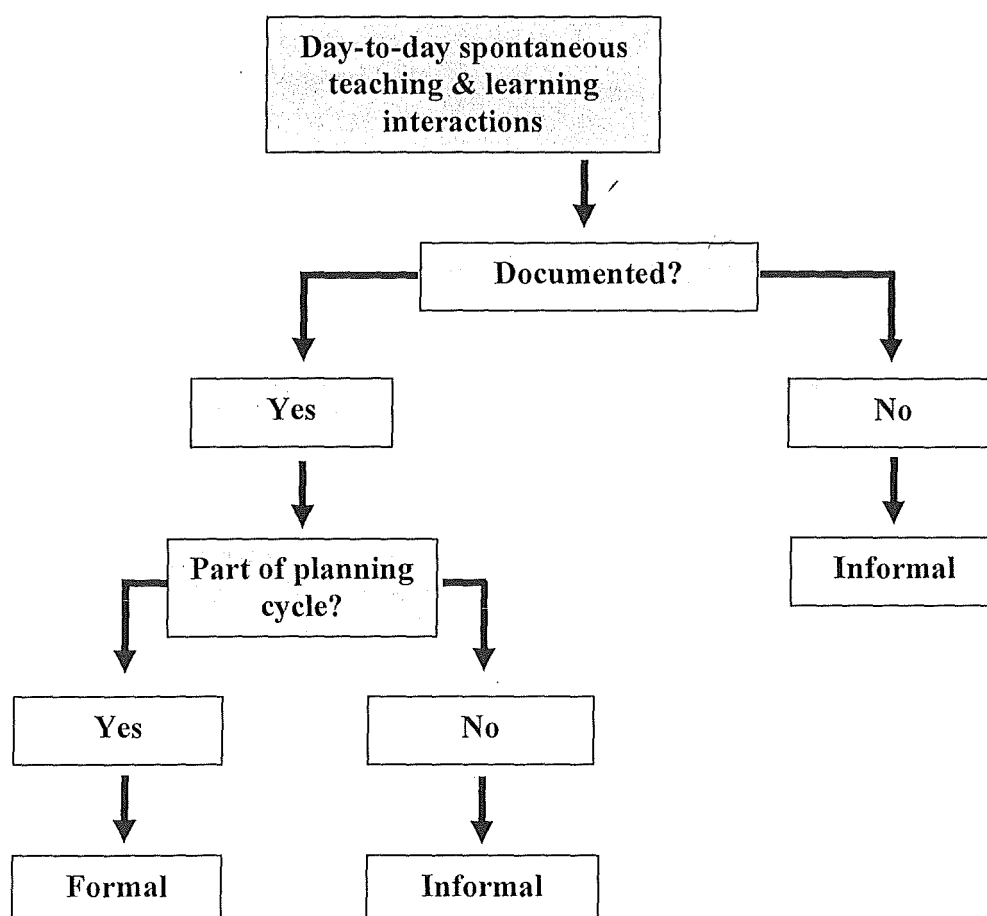
Rachel – *Well the planning meeting stuff I would call the formal stuff.*

Me - *And why is that? Because it's at a planning meeting?*

Rachel – *Because it's written down, and it follows that cycle.*

Figure 4.1 represents the way the teachers' categorised approaches to assessment as either formal or informal. Through further discussion it became clear that the criteria the teachers used to evaluate an approach to assessment, was not the only set of criteria the teachers applied to this layer of their assessment practice. A set of criteria was also applied to evaluate types of 'observation'.

Figure 4.1 Categorisation of assessment.



Making meaning of observation

As stated previously, although assessment was considered part of a formal cyclical process, assessment was also described by the group in terms of being 'informal'. Kate, a teacher

who works within the 'under two' area of the centre, described her assessments as 'informal' and linked to observation.

I think we have very, very informal assessment though. We don't do formal assessment as such. Well I've never known us in the nursery [under two area] to do our formal observations and use your, it's more an informal anecdotal. (Kate)

Though observation is widely considered part of assessment in the sector, the teachers often referred to observation *as* assessment and vice versa. The group agreed they do not do 'formal' assessment. However, given their repeated reference to assessment as observation, this could be taken as meaning they do not do 'formal' *observations*. The teachers saw observations as having informal or formal qualities and had a set of criteria they attached to observation to decide what makes an observation one or the other. The criteria revolved around whether an observation was objective or subjective, and it was the trained teachers who contributed to discussion around this issue, with none of the untrained or in-training teachers participating. The teachers considered objective observations as formal and subjective observations as informal, drawing on learning from their training to explain:

Kate – *And I think formal is what we've learnt at College, and it's a running record or a language running record, and you've got the set procedure to follow and that's what I'd call formal assessment.*

Emma – *And your informals, your anecdotes, your group discussion your,*

Kate – *Subjective.*

Emma – *And that discussion about that child that you have.*

The group debated what makes something subjective or objective for some time during the group interview but were clear that being objective was desirable in a formal approach.

Members of the team described many features they attributed to objective formal observations, particularly around their role as an observer and where they positioned themselves and their thoughts, together with the rules they associated with this type of observation, all clearly positivist in origin. The teachers were very clear that they were not able to include judgments or personal thoughts in 'formal' observations as this would compromise objectivity:

Rachel – *Because you can't say...*

Sarah – *Oh yeah but you can say it 'seemed to be', 'it appeared to'.*

Bridget – *It's what you see, what you observe, it's what you write down.*

Me – *Why can't you put your own thought into it?*

Bridget – *It depends, when you can clearly see what is happening there, then you can write down what has happened there but you have to be very careful that you don't read more into it or write more about, you know put your feelings onto it. You have to be really, look at it as from the outside, [...]*

Michelle – *Like you are a tape recorder.*

Michelle's comparison to the role of the teacher to that of a 'tape recorder' indicates the view that she believes she should record what she observes exactly as it occurs. Other teachers spoke of the need to establish ownership if personal belief entered an observation. For most of the teachers careful wording was required in any formal observation otherwise the observation would be considered 'anecdotal':

Kate – *You have to own it.*

Bridget – *But you know, 'it appears', it's what you see. You can put a certain thing to it but we can't really say well this is what happened, that's what it is, you can only say what it 'appears to be'. Which it's that*

which you think about, it maybe is, but it also leaves it open to say maybe it wasn't that at all.

Sarah – *As long as it wasn't written in a formal observation, if it was written in an anecdotal form then that was ok.*

Bridget – *I understood how through my whole College experience was that the most important word was 'it appears!'*

Sarah – *'It seems!'*

Bridget – *'It appears!' as in, it maybe this is, maybe this, that's what it looks like to me, so you know, it leaves you right out of the equation.*

Rachel – *That was your disclaimer.*

Bridget – *Yeah, that's my disclaimer, I give up my responsibility! [Laughing]*

Michelle – *You could write that at the bottom of every Learning Story!*

[Laughing]

Though the above comments about 'disclaimers' at the bottom of Learning Stories were made in jest, the teachers' beliefs expressed above are telling of the influence of positivist assumptions. In Chapter Three, I presented Anne Smith's 1988 view of observation:

Behaviour is something measurable that can be seen and heard by a variety of observers. Words used to describe our observations should refer to behaviour rather than to processes or characteristics which are thought responsible for behaviour.

The beliefs the teachers in this study articulated reflected Smith's 1988 view of observation and the teacher's role in this. The teachers in this setting were adhering to the positivist logic behind objective observation and assuming the etic view was most important. Although the teachers firmly agreed with the beliefs they expressed about the nature of observation, these beliefs did create a dilemma when this thinking was applied to practice.

The teachers also agreed it was important to include what you think and your understandings of a child in an observation. In particular, Emma raised the issue of knowing a child well:

Emma – *I guess there is a line there though, because yet at some stage in their life you're doing an observation, and you have spent two years with them and you know that [...] what they are doing does means, this and this. So there's a certain amount you can say about a child, or interpret.*

Bridget – *Yeah, there are some things you can interpret about a child, because you know the child.*

Although this dilemma was raised and most in the group agreed with Emma's and Bridget's comments, the teachers did not question how this view could be accepted within the context of their subjective Vs objective debate. One over two teacher, Jo, who was not present at the group interview, was challenged by putting the traditional beliefs from her training into practice, especially when it came to children she had such close relationships with.

[...] it's really hard to be objective about someone you say 'I love you too' to. If I was saying that to my children I can't really claim to be objective in everything I do for them so I think that kind of goes out the window really.

(Jo)

Jo's comment and those of Emma and Bridget are illustrative of a central tension that develops when positivist values and the interpretivist values of *Te Whariki* collide. On the one hand the teachers are drawn to remove themselves from the child and to be 'objective', not allowing their personal thoughts, feelings or beliefs to interfere with their observation of childrens' behaviours. While on the other hand, the teachers are drawn to getting to know

the child well, to developing a close relationship of trust and confidence between child and teacher. These qualities are widely understood in the sector as vital in order to support a child's sense of *Well Being* and *Belonging* as described in *Te Whariki*. These qualities are also seen as necessary if a teacher is to honour the principles of the framework of *Te Whariki*. This significant tension is reflected by Jo as she describes how her view as a student, of how to write a Learning Story, conflicts with her teaching reality:

[...] often when I'm writing Learning Stories, I'm writing the story, I stop and I'm talking to the child, help them do whatever they want because they have approached me, because they've probably got a close relationship with me. If I'm doing a story on them it's probably because they are in my group, so it's really hard for me to kind of be up in my little ivory tower looking down on the child and writing down what they are doing and saying [...]

For the teachers in this study the limited use of 'formal' observations may indicate that the pull of interpretivist values such as those described by *Te Whariki*, appear stronger in their practice than the positivist values of their training, a point I will return to later in this chapter. A dilemma of another kind became apparent when the subjectivity of *Learning Stories* was raised. It was during the group's discussion of subjective Vs objective, that a member of the group queried whether a Learning Story was formal or informal.

Making meaning of Learning Stories

In the second and third chapters I referred to Learning Stories as an interpretive approach to assessment that utilises narrative by combining observation, interpretation and analysis, with possible responses, and is guided by sociocultural theory. Learning Stories also incorporate Margaret Carr's dispositional framework, a distillation of the five strands of *Te*

Whariki (Carr, 1997). This approach is representative of an alternative set of assumptions about the authenticity of assessment, to those traditionally accepted as appropriate. Given the focus of this study, to explore how teachers use narrative assessment to inform practice, I was particularly interested at this point to see how the group answered the question of whether Learning Stories were formal or informal. The team seemed to view Learning Stories as an additional observation tool that they positioned within their pool of other traditional observation tools.

Rachel – *So learning stories, what would you call them?*

Sarah – *Informal*

Kate – *Anecdotal?*

Sarah – *Because they're usually starting from a,*

Bridget – *They are just presented in a different format.*

Emma – *See that's interesting that you say that, if you are calling that, Learning Stories informal but it's a type of documentation, as like say event recording or that sort of thing is, you're still,*

Sarah – *It's more subjective.*

Susan – *The review of a Learning Story is perhaps the formal thing.*

Sarah – *Yeah probably. Because often you see the thing that's happened, write it down, sometimes you don't write it down straight away but you might write it down half an hour later and, and it's more subjective, because you're writing it then, you're not writing every exact thing that's going, you know, that you're seeing. You can't write that down so you write what happened but it's more in a subjective form, more informal.*

Rachel – *And it's probably not impartial.*

Sarah – *Yeah that's what I meant.*

- Rachel – *It's more debatable, not black and white.*
- Sarah – *Yeah, and there is probably more of feeling with the anecdotal recording like you say, they did this, but really how could you measure that, how could you see it, it was more what you thought, that what's makes it so difficult.*

By applying their existing positivist criteria to Learning Stories, the teachers came to the conclusion that Learning Stories should be classed as 'informal'. The teachers' discussion indicates to me that though the teachers used Learning Stories as a tool, they had limited understanding of the values of the paradigm within which Learning Stories fit, and therefore, what makes Learning Stories different from the traditional method or approach taken to assessment in the early childhood sector. I will return to the issue of how teachers used this type of narrative, and others, later in this chapter, but move now to the second major theme, *assessment as contributing to practice*.

Assessment as contributing to practice

The team had two major procedural components to their practice that related to assessment at the centre. The first revolved around implementing and maintaining the 'planning cycle' and the second, around keeping a profile book for each child. The teachers put a tremendous amount of time and energy into developing and implementing procedures and systems to manage the planning cycle and profile books. Though the group spoke of assessment as part of the planning cycle, and implementing this cycle was of high importance to them, establishing and maintaining the profile books was a significant part of their work too and they spent several hours of their week working on these. At times profile books included input from parents and children and the information in profile books was designed to feed into the 'formal' planning cycle. The theme *assessment as contributing practice* emerged

through the data on teachers' views around how their assessment practice impacts on their teaching and on the decisions they made in relation to children's learning.

Previously I have written about the teachers implementing the planning cycle because they saw this as something they *had* to do, it was embedded in their training and they saw it as a Ministry of Education directive. In the layer of practice associated with the profile books, I found there was a connection between the teachers' purposes for the profile books and the audience(s) for whom they saw these were being prepared.

Assessment serving multiple audiences

The purposes and audiences of the profile books were closely linked for teachers and they had up to six potential audiences in mind. Multiple audiences meant there were multiple purposes for the profile books and in some cases, who the teacher saw the profile books as being primarily for, impacted not only on the perceived purpose of them, but also on what and how teachers documented. In most cases, the teachers described the profile books as a record of sorts, with their primary audience being parents.

Emma thought of the profile books as a record of a child's learning journey at the centre and Abby held a similar view, considering it a record of the children and their life, inside the centre, while at the same time referring to it as a journal or diary for parents 'who don't have the chance to see what they [children] are actually doing'. In this sense the profile books were communication tools supporting understanding between teachers and parents, and parents were seen as possible contributors to, and regular readers of, the profile books. During discussion of the team's shared philosophy of the centre, teachers spoke of *relationships*, the concept of *whanau* and *communication* between the child's parents, or home and the teachers, or centre as things they valued very highly at the centre. The profile

books were a tool that teachers felt supported responsive and reciprocal relationships between themselves and parents. Teachers aimed to appeal to parents' attention in what and how they documented and in some cases this level of attention was reflected in the emphasis put on presentation. Michelle described the books as being for parents, and of how she thought of appeal to parents when deciding on the contents of the books she was responsible for:

Michelle - *And I like to do my pictures like this they pop open.*

Me - *Oh right so presentation is pretty important to you?*

Michelle - *Oh yeah definitely, I like to think, you know that if I was a parent I'd like to have it kind of nice looking.*

Kate identified the parents as the main audience for her too, but also herself and the team. She saw a link between the use of the books and discussion and decision-making at planning meetings, though indicated that 'knowing your children well' may mean the book is not directly required:

I think it's a record for the parents, so they have a record of their child's development during their time at the centre. I think that's the main thing, and then secondary, I use it when we are planning. It's always good to have that to go back to, if you need to. Usually you know your children well enough you don't need your book, but your book backs up that if you are going to say they've got a big interest in the books, that you can see [...] but mainly I think it's for the parents. I think it's a record for them, to see what their children are doing, and to see where they've been.

(Kate)

Children were an important audience for most teachers, and older children in particular were positioned as either onlookers, 'readers' or active contributors. Children did not have free

access to the profile books and teachers cited the risk of children damaging these as the reason for keeping the books out of reach of the children. Instead, children were able to ask for their book when they wanted to look at it and, when possible, given their busy day, teachers' tried to share the books with children. Teachers also sought ideas, memories and artifacts from older children to include in the books. For example, teachers spoke of taking digital photographs of significant or interesting moments of the children at play to illustrate learning the teachers valued. Teachers would, at times, share these photos with children and elicited children's opinions and ideas around these and included these in the child's book. Several teachers held a romantic view of the profile books and spoke of the historical value of these books to the child and their family, particularly when the children were older. These teachers described the books as a type of album or keep-sake for children to look back at later in life so that they could see what they were like as young children.

...and you know when Maddy grows up it would be really neat to have, to have this to keep for always. (Michelle)

To me, I wish I had a book like that, to tell me about what I was doing, who my friends were and how it was and who I was, and you know, I think it's going to be a real treasure for the children who are one day going to be able to read through and see what it was like... (Abby)

Sarah described the profile books as providing a story of the child's life at the centre.

[...] the book is a story or journey from when the child started at preschool 'til they have moved to the over two's or 'til they've finished, so it's a story about their journey in the 'unders' and how they have developed and progressed and friendships they've made, and things like that... (Sarah)

Jo saw the profile books as useful for supporting and encouraging communication between herself and parents, and spoke of more immediate outcomes for the children she shared the profile books with during her work with them:

I find they are a really great way for starting up conversations with parents. I think that's one of the best things about them is that they are a really positive starting point to build a relationship with a parent, [...] that's one of the main benefits I see from them. And they are [...] a really good source of self-esteem for children. They are really proud of having their books and looking through them. (Jo)

Kate had a positive view of the use of profile books at the centre in terms of the impact on her practice. The profile books provided a site of reflection for Kate herself, and she could see these gave her and the team information which had a direct impact on children in terms of improving or adding to the teaching strategies and experiences they planned for children.

I think it is always good when you, when you're doing it. It jolts on things in your mind, oh yeah that is happening, and it does. Yeah I'm sure it does. I think it's really good for you to just to [pause] to just catch up with your children. See it's easy when you are just sitting out there all day working with children and not, [pause], not thinking [pause] beyond what's happening, you know, and you're always [thinking], oh yes I have to do these routines and you, sometimes you cannot look out of just what's happening and what's going to happen next. Whereas when you've got this [...] it can give you a purpose for why you are there as well to help along with, oh this is happening for this child, oh right so I can look at providing this for them and providing experiences. I think, yeah I definitely think these help with doing these otherwise you could just be stuck. [Pause] Yeah you just be stuck there with the next thing after the next after the next without looking any further. You could get trapped in there. (Kate)

One of Emma's audiences was parents and in addition she pointed to the team as an audience. As Kate did, Emma saw the team as the audience during planning meetings and like Kate she too saw the positive impact on teacher practice in terms of team reflection at planning meetings. Emma also established a link to legislation, in this case the *DOPs* and the Education Review Office (ERO), an outsider accountability audience:

Well it's part of the communication and consultation with parents. I mean ok we're living up to DOPs stuff, where it you know, [...] things for individual children throughout our programme, we can identify what we are doing, we can show that hey we've done this and we've done that and we're showing their journey of learning really. [...] That helps us to see where they've been what they're doing and we can look back and reflect and all that side of things and what there is in documentation for that child. [...] So it's partly for us, and our process for our planning, and our programme and our environment and I mean everything you can pull out of those books and say, 'hey that worked really well with that group of children and we might use it for someone else', and it's for the parents to see this is what we do, this is what your child has been involved with, this is where we are heading for your child, this is what we've planned for your child, this is why, this is how, and they can carry on at home hopefully. (Emma)

The least spoken of audience was the child's first primary school teacher. Although the teacher who made reference to this was not sure the books were shared with these teachers or not, this audience seemed to have little impact on the content. Though teachers aimed to appeal most to their primary audience, parents, what they chose to include in the profile books also had a lot to do with what appealed to themselves, and the following section discusses this aspect specifically.

The approach taken by teachers: Profile Books

As I stated earlier, the profile books were where teachers collated and presented their observations about a child and each teacher was responsible for the books of children they are primary caregiver¹ to. The centre's assessment policy set an expectation that the profile books would contain a range of information, specifically:

- a. Formal Learning Stories – Illustrating each child's level of wellbeing, belonging, exploration, contribution and communication within the Centre's programme and curriculum opportunities
- b. Artwork – showing each child's progression of creative developmental skills over a period of time.
- c. Photos – illustrating each child's time at the centre and showing their involvement, relationships, abilities and interests
- d. Anecdotal records – recording particular snippets of each child's day, particular achievements or developmental successes.
- e. Individual Learning Objectives – Individual goals for each child to be worked on by staff over an identified period. These individual Learning Objectives will be set and reviewed in consultation with parents/whanau.

Despite the above policy's use of the term 'formal' to describe Learning Stories, the range of data described above in the centre's policy point to 'informal' as being the expectation. Though teachers raised the issue of 'formal' and 'informal' observations during discussion of their view of assessment, when it came to the putting assessment into practices the teachers largely used 'informal' observation methods and annotated photos and examples of

¹ The centre operated a primary caregiver system where teachers were given responsibility to settle and support specific children and their families across their time at the centre. Teachers do not work solely with the children they are primary caregiver to. Rather teachers work with all children and encourage relationships between all children, teachers and families. Primary caregiving is aimed at encouraging the child and their family's wellbeing and belonging, particularly during their early days at the centre.

children's work. The teachers did not point to the expectations of the policy as the reason why they largely used 'informal' methods of observation, but rather because of the difficulties the teachers associated with observing this way in practice.

It was during individual interviews that teachers shared their views that 'formal' observations held limited practical value, an obvious rejection of the beliefs they had articulated in the group interview. The trained teachers, in particular, seemed to agree with the rationale behind the criteria for 'formal' and 'informal' but there were very few members of the group, trained or untrained, who actually applied these beliefs in practice. For Kate, a trained teacher, 'formal' observations were unnecessary detail both for herself and for parents, though she identified these could be useful to outsiders, such as, agencies that support children with disabilities:

Kate - I think if I needed to do that, it would be because something would be happening and it would be something that really needed to be looked at. Maybe we thought there was a developmental delay or I don't know, for whatever, a physical or something like that, and then I probably think it has its place, someone really needs that exact information

Me - Yeah so somebody really needs that, like somebody else?

Kate - Yes.

Me - So maybe not you?

Kate - Yeah, yeah. If you were passing it on to an agency or, you know, somebody like that [...] who needed exact information. I don't think we need the exact information and I don't think parents do. I think parents can see that their child probably leads with their left foot...

Sarah found the task of doing 'formal running records' both unhelpful and uninspiring, and pointed to 'anecdotal' observations as her favourite method of assessment, because of its usefulness and the speed with which she could document in this way:

[...] It's quick and you can just write just a short kind of statement really and it can still tell a lot. And I find running records are long and boring and they don't necessarily tell you as much as you know a little anecdotal does, [...] Instead of writing a long tedious 'they are doing this' [...] That's just really boring to me and I hate doing them. (Sarah)

Abby, an untrained teacher working in the 'over two' area of the centre, indicated that she felt somehow that the child was altered when the 'official' way was applied:

[...] I'm not just writing things and I've got as well some spontaneity to give it that more [...] to make it not official so it shows the child as he is [pause] true, his personality, [...] I want him to be intact, and show how he really is, always very positive but [pause] but not to have on the official thing, the official thing [...] but I'm probably wrong so that's what I want to do training because I want to have some guidelines and know what's right and what's wrong. (Abby)

This is an interesting perspective from Abby. As an untrained teacher Abby recognises a shift in the identity of the child when the 'official' approach is taken. This change is something she obviously avoids, though she doubted whether to trust her intuition. Abby also identifies training as where she will learn to do what is right or wrong, while at the same time she also expresses concern about whether this training will alter her identity also.

[...] I hope my training is not just going to wipe you know everything out, my opinion on something, my feelings [...] about what the child is doing at the

moment is quite important now, I hope it is not going to become not important after the training, that's what I'm worried about [...]

Though Abby felt confident about her day-to-day work with children, it was her work around the profile books that she had doubts about and believed training could help her here. Her reflection indicates a level of doubt about how she feels about her role with the profile books compared to her role when working with children, perhaps indicating a misalignment:

I doubt it will, it will help me because [...] because I think I'm quite confident, I'm confident in what I'm doing [working with children] and I think that if I was doing wrong the other teachers would have probably would have told me [...] just to have a bit more reassurance in what I am doing [in the profile books] and to write and to inform the parents the right way a lot more specifically... (Abby)

Abby was not alone in feeling uncertain about the approach she was taking. Several trained teachers expressed similar feelings. Jo, who saw objectivity as a problem and so did not choose objective observation as a tool for assessing, still seemed to doubt her choice in approach describing a sense of failure around what she was doing.

[...] I feel like I'm failing in what I do in the books because it's not formal enough. (Jo)

This sense of doubt about what the teachers were doing was often associated with a difference between what teachers had learnt in their training and what they had come to understand was the reality of teaching:

I've been working for two and a half years and what I do now in my work is quite different to what I thought I would do when I was at College and

University. When I was at University I did a paper and for a term we talked about Learning Stories. And my husband actually said to me the other day, 'Remember how when you were at University and you learnt all about Learning Stories and things like that. Do you do that now? And I said, it's so different. I wish I'd had a term that was more real. Where I talked about assessment and Learning Stories and things where it was more realistically based and not so theoretically based and so, 'best case' scenario. What I do now is in a limited timeframe [...] I'm limited in my resources [...]' (Jo)

Workload pressures and the teachers' ability to manage the task of profile books for all children in a busy and physically exhausting job was a challenge for the teachers. While Jo talked of a sense of failure others spoke of 'getting behind' in their work and the difficulty in gathering information for the profile books during their work with children. Rachel spoke of a sense of responsibility to parents that I interpret as accountability, and said she worried when her books got behind.

[...] I don't think it's fair on the parents actually to have their books way behind. They like to see their books and I sort of feel, well, I'm not doing the job properly if I can't keep these things up to date, yeah there's just all those sorts of issues 'cos I don't like not being up to date. (Rachel)

For Rachel, a person in a position of responsibility at the centre, getting behind was due to the many additional tasks of someone in her role when only limited time was available to her away from contact with children. Time was a barrier to most teachers. Though several of the teachers referred to the use of 'formal observations' in their work, and they previously rejected these approaches because of their irrelevance, teachers also pointed to time limitations as a barrier to doing these. This implies that perhaps if the teachers had

time, formal observations would be more relevant to them. Instead, teachers tried to keep what they recorded in the profile books 'simple'. Keeping the contents simple and linked to the Curriculum were two things Emma encouraged given this time barrier:

...I think that they need to keep it simple in those [profile] books, It needs to be simple. It needs to be connectable to Te Whariki, [...] if it's not, then don't waste your time. Over the years I've become a bit cut throat about things because [...] when you're in management and working with money, and it's a matter of ok [...] we've only got this amount of time, it's just not going to be achievable for us to figure out how we can get more time. That's not in the equation. So let's make it work for that time equation. (Emma)

Because of time limitations, many of the teachers said they wrote from memory or jotted down a few words to prompt them for when they had a chance to sit down and write the story proper. For Michelle, writing from memory was not only about not having time in her day, but also about time away from the children.

[...] I think it's ok because you want to spend as much time as possible with the children. I mean that's what parents are paying for this for, you know, their learning and if you go away, well that's your time out away from them [...] I always find if I do actually sit down and try and write something down, they will try and come up to you anyway and I never get anything written down. So I normally have to wait 'til later. (Michelle)

In the teachers' desire to 'keep it simple', the detail of what they included in the children's profile books was limited. The majority of their entries in the profile books were brief examples or descriptive narratives of the child's involvement in the programme, with or without photographs, and examples of children's work. By reducing the profile books in this

way, I felt the teachers had reduced the visibility of the complexity of children's learning, especially when they did not make their understandings or analysis of these observations explicit. To elaborate on this point I draw on the definition of assessment by Mary Jane Drummond (1993), referred to earlier in this dissertation:

The ways in which in our everyday practice we observe children's learning, strive to understand it and then put our understanding to good use. (p. 13)

The teachers in this study were, in their everyday practice, observing children's learning, and at times they were recording some of these observations. Drummond suggests that *striving to understand* is the next step of this process and I consider this to be about interpretation, analysis and reflection. Though the teachers might have done this in their heads or during day-to-day sharing of their observations with others, these were rarely made visible in the children's profile books alongside the vast majority of examples of learning they have observed. Furthermore, the examples documented did not necessarily point out explicitly what learning they had noticed in the first instance. The final step Drummond identifies as part of assessment is putting *our understanding to good use*. Again, though teachers may well put the understanding they carry around in their heads to *good use*, and I take this to mean to inform the teaching and learning process thus improving outcomes for children, this was not made visible to the other audiences of the profile books.

As I have stated, this was the case for the vast *majority* of examples included in children's profile books. However, of the six profile books I analysed, that in total contained several hundred documented examples, there were four examples of Learning Stories where teachers document, each of the steps Drummond refers to as being assessment. Rachel could see value in including a documented possible 'what next' with her observations. However she indicated that although a 'what next' might not always get written down, this does not

mean she does not respond to what she notices and recognizes about the child's learning and her own teaching:

[...] For my part most of it is diary entries and art work and I don't really have as many Learning Stories as I would like to have in there. I think they're really important [...] especially the later forms where you are looking at what the child is doing then and saying well what's next? What you're going to do next [...] How you are going to work with the child...

Revisiting the planned 'what next' is something Rachel pointed to as challenging too, meaning often she could not do this.

But then I find you do this one and you might do 'what's next' but sometimes you don't get round to documenting what actually happened next, you're busy [...] and I think that's because of the reality with me at the moment is being behind a bit [...] and there are all sorts of other things going on at the same time.

Rachel's view begs the question, that if the teachers are observing, interpreting and responding to children's learning without writing most of these things down, why write anything down? The teachers have already pointed to three reasons they see as worthwhile for documenting what they notice of children's learning in their centre, even if they usually do not make analysis or possible teaching responses visible. The first reason is to support reciprocal and responsive relationships between teachers and parents. The second reason is to inform the teaching and learning process via individual teacher reflection and team planning meetings, and the third, to involve children in discussion around their learning.

An additional negative effect of time limitations was the isolation from others of teachers and their thinking around the content of the books. That is, the books' content was often

reflective of only one perspective. Most teachers acknowledged that they knew little about how other teachers 'did' their profile books. Though some members of the group shared their non-contact time and the observations of other teachers were included at times, it was rare that the contents of profile books would be worked on as a collaborative process. According to the teachers, they tried to document observations for other teachers but given the time pressures on them trying to document for the profile books they were primarily responsible for, this was not as regular as they would have liked it to be.

During the course of this phase of data collection I was interested to see how the teachers were communicating their observations of children's learning. In particular, I was interested in what approach the teachers were taking to documenting assessments. I was especially interested in how teachers were using narrative, given they had told me at the time I was selecting a centre for this study that they used Learning Stories. I had heard the teachers refer to what they wrote down as 'observations', 'stories' or 'anecdotal'. The teachers spoke of writing 'little' or 'short' stories of what they had noticed or observed, often calling these observations both an 'anecdotal' and a 'story'. Teachers also spoke of writing 'Learning Stories' though some teachers also described these as 'running records'. During the course of this phase I came to see that the teachers communicated their observations in three ways.

Firstly, the teachers talked about how they would often tell stories to each other and parents about children as a natural part of their day-to-day work, and spoke of this sharing in terms of communication. Though I did not focus my attention directly on gathering any examples of such stories, I was certainly present in the centre as teachers told stories to each other. I felt that this telling of stories was probably the way these teachers most often used narrative in this setting. The second type of 'stories' the teachers referred to were used as a method

for documenting. The vast majority of documented observations were concise descriptions the teachers usually referred to as 'stories' or 'anecdotes'. These stories captured an observation made by a teacher. For example:

'Riley enjoyed wearing the fireman's hat[. H]e stood on the slide and went [']wee wo wee wo['] like a fire engine. Then he smiled broadly.'

'Benjamin crawled over to the sprinkler where Kahu and Emily were playing. Kahu and Emily held onto the end of the sprinkler making the water shoot higher and higher into the air[. T]hey would then jump away squealing. Benjamin watched and laughed as he got sprayed with water.'

Thirdly, the teachers wrote 'Learning Stories' that were either documented on a template or presented in other ways, such as handwritten on a decorated page. As stated above, the teachers often called their Learning Stories 'running records' or vice versa, indicating to me that they see them as one and the same. Learning Stories are intended to utilise narrative by combining observation, interpretation and analysis, with possible responses and are interpretivist in origin. When I looked to the six profile books for examples of the Learning Stories the teachers spoke about writing, I found that the teachers had often used traditional approaches to observation within their Learning Stories. For example, most of the description documented was written like a 'running record' where the teacher had recorded precise; detailed description and the teacher writing the story had spoken about herself in the third person. Just as the teachers had previously used positivist criteria for making meaning of Learning Stories, the positivist thinking was also evident when it came to using Learning Stories as a method of assessment. Learning Stories had provided the teachers with an alternative structure to their more traditional techniques. However, I felt the teachers had not recognized the paradigm shift that Learning Stories represent. From

discussion with the teachers about Learning Stories it was clear that their training had reinforced positivist assumptions:

When I was taught I anticipated that when I was out in my teaching it was going to be much more, I would be removed from a situation almost, and focusing on a child and writing a Learning Story. Writing [...] what I see in the present tense and follow all of the steps [...] not being involved in the situation. Not talking to the child. [...] I wouldn't be involved in the situation, that I would be off to one side and just quietly writing [...] (Jo)

The approach taken by teachers: Implementing the planning cycle

To implement the 'planning cycle' into their practice the centre had developed a procedural document that outlined expectations of staff around 'Programme Planning and Evaluation'. This document was separate from the centre's assessment policy that states:

The information contained in profile books along with staff informal knowledge² will be used to establish

- a. Common Learning Objectives for larger groups (Group Planning)
- b. Children's interests for smaller groups (Project Planning)
- c. Individual Learning Objectives for each child (in consultation with parent/whanau)

The centre's statement around 'Programme Planning and Evaluation' describes planning three types of programme planning:

² Reference is made above to 'staff informal knowledge' and I interpret this to refer to the interactions have and observations teachers make during their day-to-day work that is not documented (see figure 4.1).

1. Core planning
2. Group Planning
3. Project Planning

Each of these types of planning was described as being discussed and evaluated at staff meetings. 'Core planning' was done on an 'as needed basis' whereas 'group planning' was 'discussed, negotiated and evaluated' at staff meetings on a 'six-week cycle'. 'Project planning' was a different approach again. This type of planning was designed to support a particular interest of some children where teachers facilitated project work. However, this type of planning was not always used by teachers. During the period of time I gathered data at the centre no 'project plans' were developed and I was not aware of any 'core planning' either. Group planning incorporating individual objectives was the main focus of the teachers during my collection of data and this was undertaken at staff meetings.

Staff meetings were held every second week during an evening for approximately two hours. The purpose of these meetings was either: 1) Objective setting for individual children, setting a group objective and developing a plan for the group based on these objectives; 2) Discussing and documenting progress in relation to the previously developed objectives and plan; or, 3) Evaluating the outcomes of the plan. Meetings included time where, as a group, teachers shared a meal and general business, as well as time where the group split into 'over two' and 'under two' teaching groups, to discuss and document according to the point they were at in the planning cycle.

I was particularly interested during my observations of these staff meetings, to see how teachers used the profile books to make planning decisions for children at the centre. Some teachers had said to me that they used these books at staff meeting time and the group had identified earlier that 'assessment' was part of the planning cycle. However, other teachers

said that they had little openness or awareness of what was contained in the books of other teachers.

[...] I've looked at a couple of the other teachers' books a couple of times to get ideas for how they set things out and things like that. But [...] we don't really discuss the content of the books. We will like kind of informally say 'oh I put this in a child's book today, a story about this' or something like that [...] (Sarah)

During my observations of staff meetings, no one referred directly to any of the profile books they kept for children, or seemed to use them in any overt way, though one book was present at one of the meetings. It seemed to me that what teachers used most were the things they carried around in their heads, the things they had noticed about a child. The teachers did not actually refer to the profile books in any physical sense. At this point in my study, I began to question the link between the profile books and planning decisions the teachers made for children. From what the teachers were telling me and from what I observed there appeared to be contradictions between different teachers, what they said and what I had observed, and what the centre's policies outlined. It was these contradictions that helped me to establish a focus for the second phase of data collection.

Chapter 5

Assessment as a complex, connected process

In the previous chapter I expressed uncertainty about my understanding around what the connection was between each of the three layers of assessment practice described by the teachers. The teachers had spoken of the profile books feeding into the planning cycle but by the end of the first phase of data collection and analysis, I wasn't clear about what they meant by this. Initially, I interpreted this to mean that the profile books were used at team meeting times, that is, these artefacts would be physically present and actively referred to during their discussion. I had expected to see the teachers using these profile books as a reference or resource they would pull examples from and discuss. I thought I might see the teachers using these books directly to support the planning cycle process, but as reported in the previous chapter, this was not the case. Of all the planning meetings I observed between teachers, only once was a profile book present at one of the meetings. I felt in reality the teachers were not using the profile books in the way that they were telling me about their use, and therefore, that what the teachers said, did not correspond with what I observed to be their practice. At the end of phase one I interpreted this as a contradiction, but I began to wonder, was this really a contradiction or was it that I held a different understanding of the connection between these layers of assessment practice to that of the teachers'?

I decided at this point that I needed to delve further into the teachers' practices and beliefs about assessment at the centre. I felt that my understandings could be clarified by focusing on how *the teachers* recognized the connections and understood their own practice, rather than focusing on how *I* had interpreted their practice. With this objective in mind, I introduced new techniques of data collection that would engage the teachers as a group to,

think in a focused way about their beliefs and their practice. As discussed in the methodology chapter, I used the premise workshops with video footage, to do this.

As a result, I began to better understand how the teachers saw they were ‘using’ profile books to plan programmes for children, the connections between the layers of assessment practice and the expectations of assessment they identified with. The teachers knew the content of the profile books intimately and felt they knew the children well. The teachers’ understanding of the children, therefore, was blended between what was written down and what was not, and was distributed across teachers, a child’s parents, the child him/herself, and other children. Where I had drawn a line between the three layers, separating these, for the teachers there was no line. Through data analysis by the end of phase two I had discerned a single theme for this study that I think captures what assessment meant for this group of teachers: *assessment as a complex, connected process*. This relates to seeing the connections between each of the three layers of assessment practice at the centre. It is also about how the teachers strived to make connections in view of the complex context of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ expectations in an early childhood education setting, and the tensions this created for the teachers in attempting to serve each of these interests. These issues will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter:

Making meaning of assessment: requirements to practice

Addressing different audiences: ‘insider’ Vs ‘outsider’ expectations

Assessment in context: making assessment their own

Making meaning of assessment: requirements to practice

In the previous chapter I wrote that the teachers’ construct of assessment at the centre, could be understood as three layers of assessment practice. These being:

1. ‘Informal’ day-to-day teaching and learning interactions;

2. 'Informal' documented observations presented in profile books, and
3. 'Formal' assessment that teachers identified as part of the 'planning cycle', a process sited most recognizably within practice associated with staff planning meetings.

I also identified the two purposes of team meetings, as 1) to implement various steps in the planning cycle, and 2) to establish and maintain the direction of the team. In phase one I focused on the teachers' use of the profile books at these meetings and identified the use of knowledge that they carried around in their heads. In phase one I credited these 'personal' observations and interpretations of teachers, as the base that they used to inform the decision-making in their planning meetings, rather than the direct use of the profile books. Furthermore, I questioned the strength of the connection between what was documented in the profile books and what teachers planned for in terms of future learning and experiences for the children.

During the initial premise workshop in phase two I held with the teachers, the idea of teachers using what was carried around in their heads to make decisions for children formed one of the premises I used to engage the teachers to reflect on their beliefs about their assessment practice. I had constructed this premise from the direct or general statements of the teachers:

*When it comes to planning we use what we carry around in our heads about
children to make decisions about what we do next.*

When I presented this premise to the teachers, they initially were unhappy with this statement and expressed surprise that they had said anything like this. After some discussion as a group, the teachers began to agree that they did use what they carried around in their heads, but wanted to alter this statement to add further meaning, and to include the other sources they drew on to help them to make decisions. The teachers spent considerable time

toying with what they might change about this statement to make it reflect their beliefs more accurately. While they agreed that they used what was in their heads, they were concerned that the premise didn't capture a true picture of how this knowledge developed. Figure 5.1 details the flow of their group thinking. Figure 5.2 presents the initial version of premise one, and the premise that the group decided best represented their reality:

It is clear from the changes the teachers made, and from the modified premise they developed, that the decisions teachers make for children are based on a network of observations and perspectives that in turn inform their programme for children. The teachers had communicated a more complex and connected picture of their beliefs about their practice through this exercise than I had initially considered. I was curious though, would the teachers still identify with this view of their practice after they had seen themselves at planning meetings in the video footage?

In the follow-up workshop, after the teachers had watched several segments of themselves during team meetings, I asked them to revisit the premises. First, I showed them the initial version of the first premise I had presented to them at the first premise workshop. This time the teachers did not react as they had the first time they saw this. Instead they agreed with the premise immediately. It was, as if, on seeing themselves in action, they could see that they drew on what was 'in their heads' rather than having documentation on hand during these meetings. I then showed them the modified version of this premise they had developed. When I showed them how they had modified the premise at the previous workshop, they agreed that this premise captured how they saw what was used to make decisions more accurately than my initial statement, although they felt that they needed to make some additional changes shown in figure 5.3. The final premise, compared to the previously modified and initial premises are presented in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.1 Flow of changes the teachers made to Premise One.

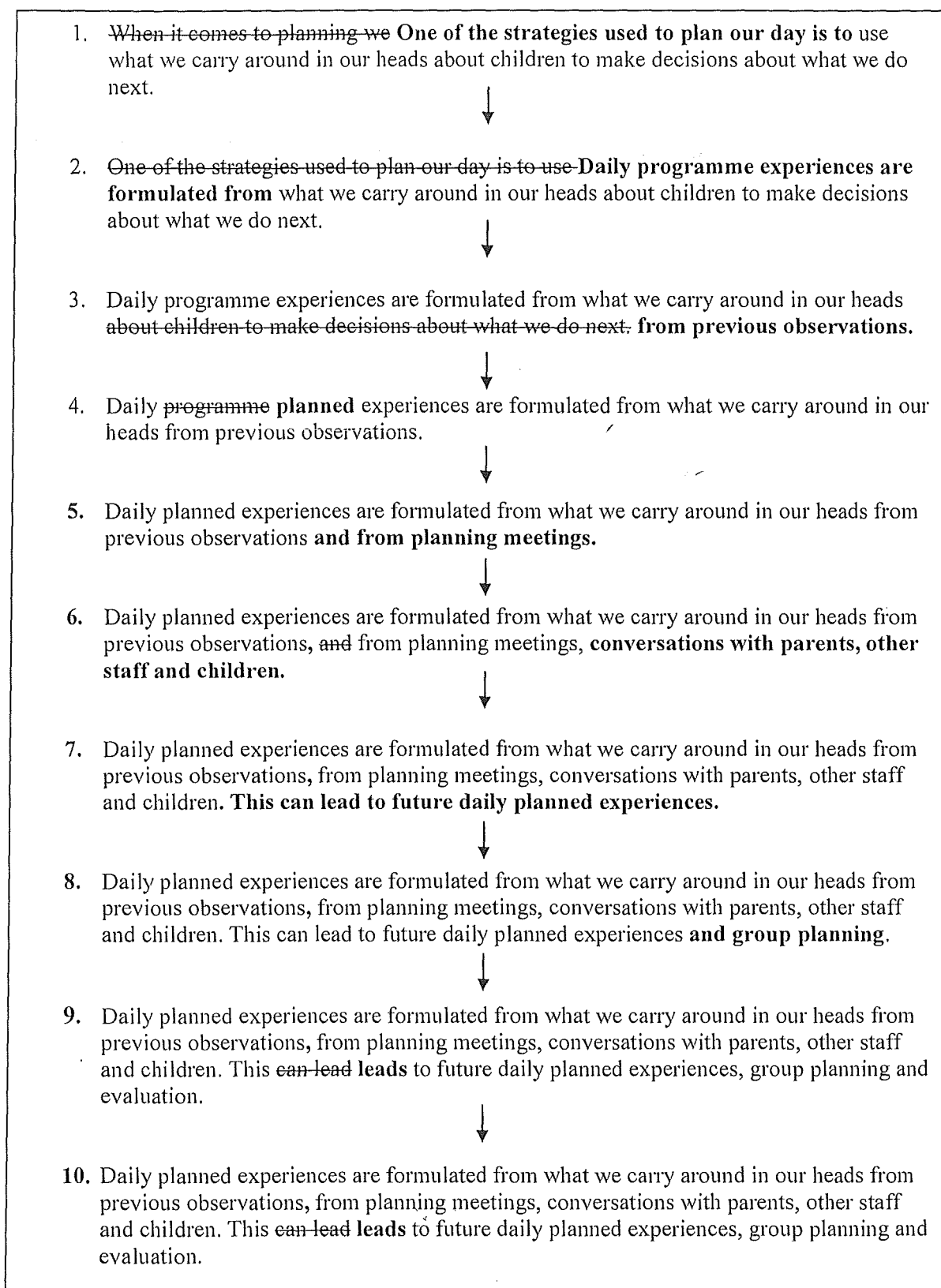


Figure 5.2 A comparison of the initial version of Premise One and the modified version.

Initial premise 1	Modified premise 1
<i>When it comes to planning we use what we carry around in our heads about children to make decisions about what we do next.</i>	<i>Daily planned experiences are formulated from what we carry around in our heads from previous observations, from planning meetings and from conversations with parents, other staff and children. This leads to future daily planned experiences, group planning and evaluation.</i>

It was clear to me from this exercise that teachers saw connections between each layer of their assessment practices, as well as, between each player in this process. After reflecting on the examples of their practice, they added even greater complexity to the picture they saw of assessment in their setting, establishing a complex weave of participants and processes. They also clarified their meaning of the word 'observations', broadening this definition to include the unwritten.

Figure 5.3 Changes teachers made to Premise Two at follow-up premise workshop

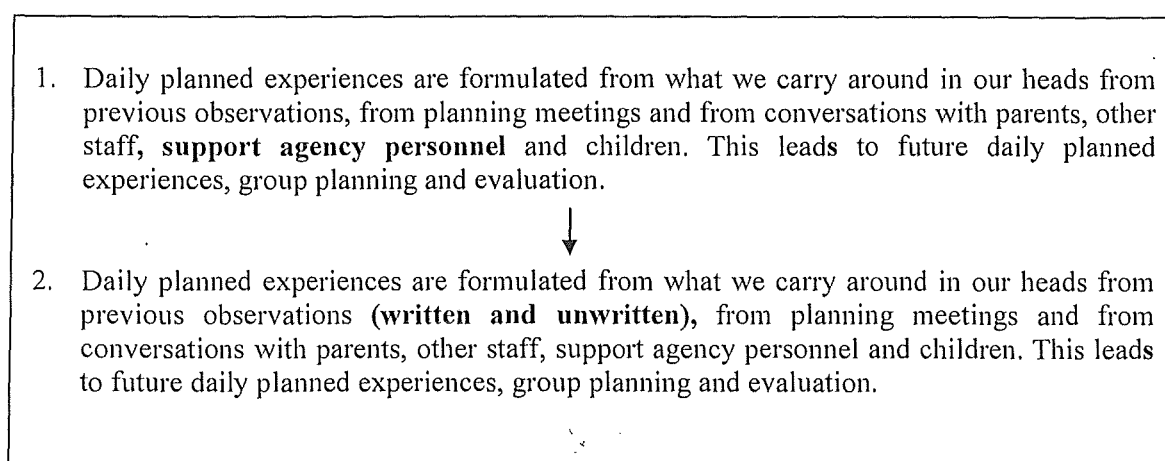


Figure 5.4 A comparison of the versions of Premise One.

Initial Premise	Modified Premise	Final Premise
<i>When it comes to planning we use what we carry around in our heads about children to make decisions about what we do next.</i>	<i>Daily planned experiences are formulated from what we carry around in our heads from previous observations, from planning meetings and from conversations with parents, other staff and children. This leads to future daily planned experiences, group planning and evaluation.</i>	<i>Daily planned experiences are formulated from what we carry around in our heads from previous observations (written and unwritten), from planning meetings and from conversations with parents, other staff, support agency personnel, and children. This leads to future daily planned experiences, group planning and evaluation.</i>

The second premise used in the workshops was about managing the profile books. In the previous phase some teachers saw the profile books as reflecting a collective voice of the teachers, while others said they rarely looked at, or contributed to the books of other teachers. I understood that the profile books, were largely an individual responsibility and that perhaps the pressures the teachers felt to keep up to date, meant these books were largely representative of their own perspective of the child. To verify the authenticity of my interpretation, I asked the group to reflect on the following premise:

We each have our own ways of doing the profile books. We do these individually and plan and evaluate programmes as a team.

The group could see immediately that there was more to add to this picture. The first change teachers wanted to make was around individual responsibility, positioning teachers in the role of ‘management’ of the books rather than full responsibility for the detail of the content. Figure 5.5 presents the flow of the groups’ thinking.

Figure 5.5 The Flow of changes teachers made to Premise Two.

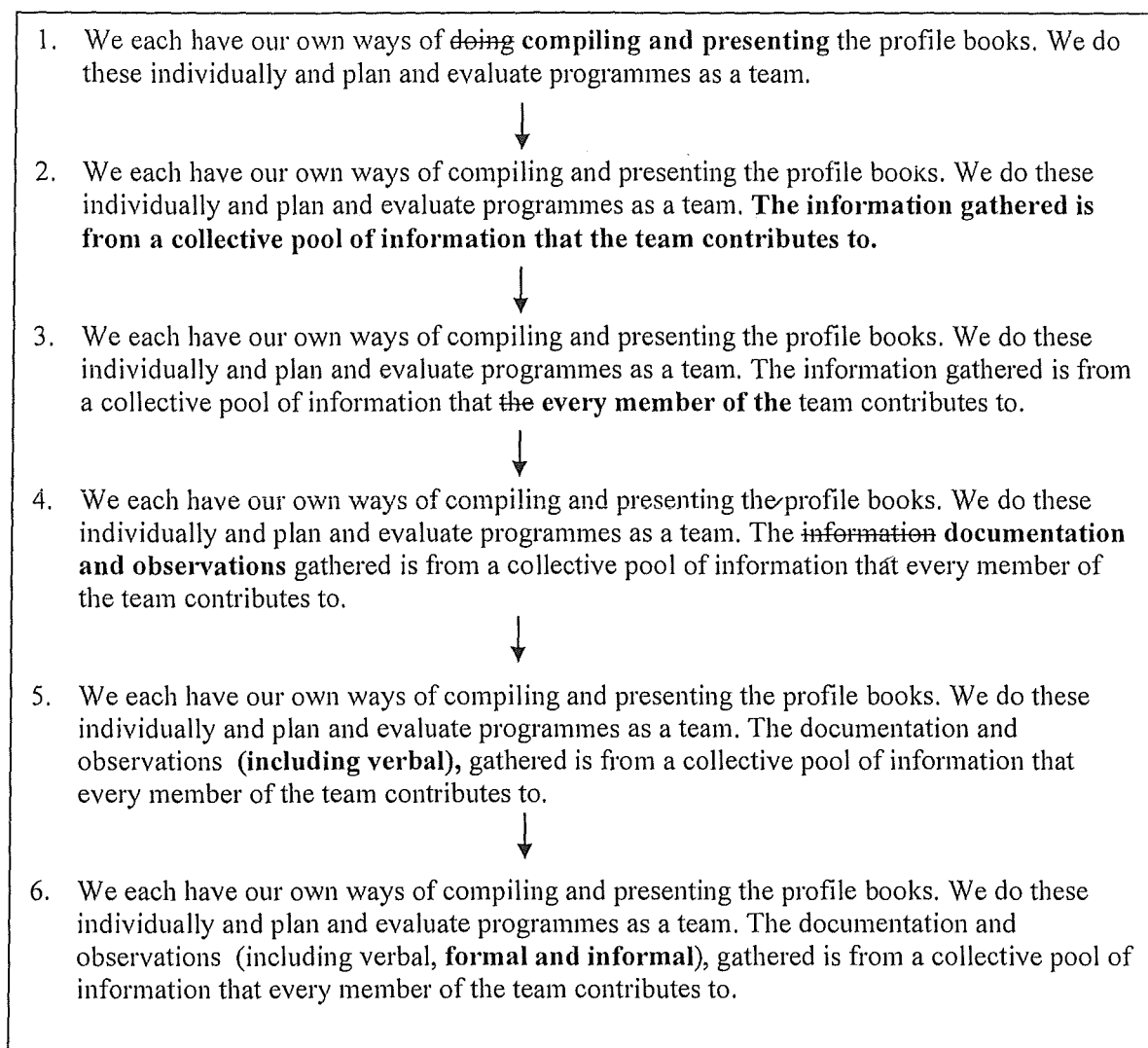


Figure 5.6 presents the initial version of premise two and the modified version following changes made by the teachers. Though the teachers may have had individual responsibility for the management of the profile books, the teachers certainly saw the documentation contained within, as a collaborative effort which included the multiple perspectives of teachers. Like the first premise, the teachers returned to the notion that they draw on a mix of documented and undocumented material to make decisions as a team. What was documented in the profile books may have been written largely by one teacher, but this was not to say that others hadn't contributed to what was written down before it was

documented. The teachers may well have discussed their observations and perspectives with one another during the course of their day, which in turn informed what the teacher responsible for the profile book decided to include in the content. In this sense, though each teacher had not have actually read the content of each child's book, they may well have known the content quite well. When it came to team meetings therefore, the books may not have been needed by the teachers for direct reference.

At the follow-up premise workshop, after watching the video footage, I represented Premise Two to the group just as I had described earlier for premise one. I asked the teachers if they felt this reflected their beliefs and if they would like to change anything about the premise they had modified previously. This time the teachers did not want to make any further alterations. They felt that after watching the video footage of their practice, that the premise they had modified, accurately reflected their beliefs and their practice.

Figure 5.6 A comparison of the versions of Premise Two.

Initial Premise	Modified Premise
<i>We each have our own ways of doing the profile books. We do these individually and plan and evaluate programmes as a team.</i>	<i>We each have our own ways of compiling and presenting the profile books. We do these individually and plan and evaluate programmes as a team. The documentation and observations (including verbal, formal and informal) gathered is from a collective pool of information that every team member contributes to.</i>

Early on during data collection for this project, several of the teachers told me that they had difficulty 'staying on track' during team planning meetings. Initially, I thought that the 'track' they referred to was the one that led towards the goal of following through each step

of the 'cycle' as they understood it, and of completing the associated paper work. During my analysis of the video recordings of the meetings in the second phase, however, I tried to see the team process without colouring it with my emphasis of the observable use of the profile books. I began to think about the 'track' the teachers were on, and came to the conclusion that there were two 'tracks'. One was about recording information for accountability, for 'outsiders'. The other track related to developing meaning or understandings about children, their learning and what the teachers' role was in this, for 'insiders', that is for themselves, the children and the parents.

Addressing different audiences' needs: 'Insider' Vs 'Outsider' Expectations

During clarification of a third premise that focused on the purpose and audiences of the profile books, the influence of 'insider' and 'outsider' expectations on the teachers' assessment practice became evident. I presented the following premise to the group:

The Learning Story books are for parents and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here.

Again the teachers wanted to widen the view to what was presented in this premise. Figure 5.7 illustrates the flow of changes the teachers made to this premise. Figure 5.8 presents the initial premise and the modified version of this process. From the teachers' alterations and their modified premise this exercise reinforced for me the view that the teachers saw the profile books first and foremost as a record for parents, and then the children, and that they valued the contributions of these audiences alongside their own. The teachers did not align 'assessment' and 'planning' to parents. Rather the profile books are positioned as a tool for 'assessment and planning', with an 'outsider' accountability audience, secondary to the purposes associated with parents. The various audiences of the profile books are established

here, and a sense of the order of importance is evident. Three purposes of the profile books became apparent at this point:

1. For providing a record to parents and children of learning in the centre
2. For assessing and planning
3. For 'outsider' accountability

After watching video footage from some of their planning meetings, I returned the teachers to the profile book premise discussed above. After watching this footage the teachers felt their previously developed premise remained a reasonably accurate reflection of their beliefs and their practice. However, they did wish to make one additional change to this to widen the 'outsider' audiences to include 'ERO and officials'. Figure 5.8 presents this alteration. Figure 5.9. provides a comparison of the initial Premise Three, the modified version of this and the final version.

Figure 5.7 The flow of changes teachers made to Premise Three.

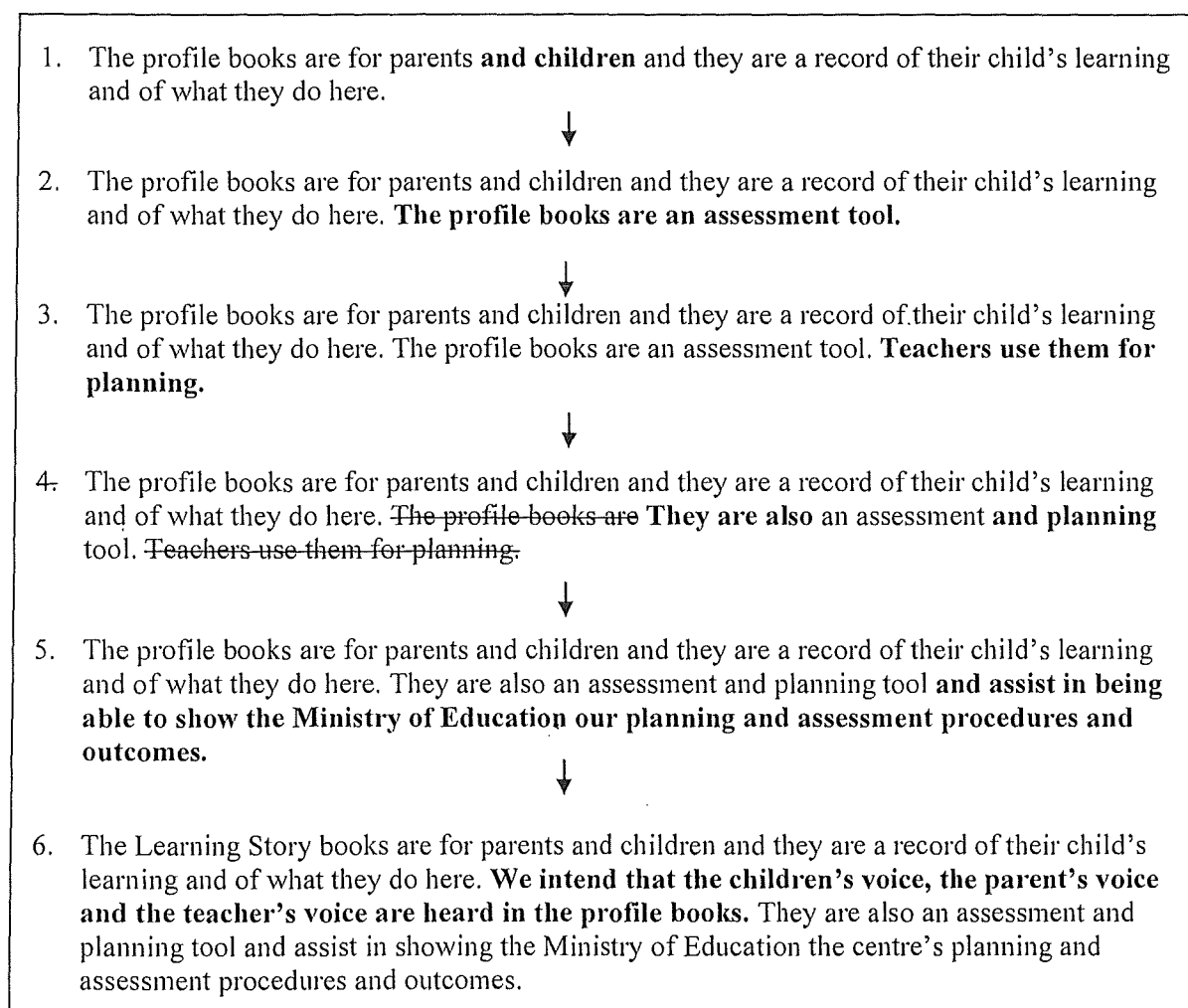


Figure.5.8 A comparison of the initial version of Premise Three and the modified version.

Initial Premise	Modified Premise
The Learning Story books are for parents and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here.	The Learning Story books are for parents and children and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here. We intend that the children's voice, the parent's voice and the teacher's voice are heard in the profile books. They are also an assessment and planning tool and assist in showing the Ministry of Education the centre's planning and assessment procedures and outcomes.

Figure 5.9 Changes teachers made to Premise Three at follow-up premise workshop.

1. The Learning Story books are for parents and children and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here. We intend that the children's voice, the parent's voice and the teacher's voice are heard in the profile books. They are also an assessment and planning tool and assist in showing the Ministry of Education, **ERO and officials**, the centre's planning and assessment procedures and outcomes.

Figure 5.10 A comparison of the versions of Premise Three.

Initial Premise	Modified Premise	Final Premise
The Learning Story books are for parents and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here.	The Learning Story books are for parents and children and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here. We intend that the children's voice, the parent's voice and the teacher's voice are heard in the profile books. They are also an assessment and planning tool and assist in showing the Ministry of Education the centre's planning and assessment procedures and outcomes.	The Learning Story books are for parents and children and they are a record of their child's learning and of what they do here. We intend that the children's voice, the parent's voice and the teacher's voice are heard in the profile books. They are also an assessment and planning tool and assist in showing the Ministry of Education, ERO and officials, the centre's planning and assessment procedures and outcomes.

To make sense of the teachers' view presented through the third premise, I turn to the work of Sally Brown, a UK writer, and her discussion of the tensions that develop, when 'outsiders', such as governments, prescribe that what should be done by the 'insiders' of early childhood education services. In Brown's description, 'insiders' are the educators and children of these early childhood settings. This prescription, Brown establishes, comes via the development of frameworks that describe the expectations in terms of programmes, outcomes, assessment and other standards for early childhood services, as well as, from the accountability measures put in place that have the effect of establishing sets of 'common outcomes and other measurable features' (2003, p. 4). Brown points out that these accountability measures ignore contextual differences that early childhood practitioners come to work by. Brown goes on to describe the result of this on practice and innovation at the centre:

The tendency is to focus on what is *general* and reduce or ignore what is *context specific*. This promotes expectations of generalisable recipes for "what works". There is also an assumption that policy prescription will *lead* and valuable developments in practice will *follow* because either playroom insiders share the perspectives of outsiders or they can easily be persuaded to do so. Research indicates that this assumption is misguided and this has implications for innovations in provision, the education of staff and practice in the playroom. (p. 4 emphasis in original)

In the case of the team of early childhood 'insiders' I studied, these teachers were using the generalized recipe for 'what works' to make meaning of assessment in their setting. The team had worked with a professional development facilitator to review their 'assessment, planning and evaluation' processes and procedures, sometime before I began this study. When it came to meeting the requirements of the 'outsider' expectations, laid out as the *DOPs* around 'assessing, planning and evaluating', the 'planning cycle' made sense to the teachers. This cycle was something the teachers were drawn to for several reasons. It was familiar to them from their training, their professional development provider reinforced its importance, and given that the cycle was provided in the resource to support the

implementation of the DOPs, the teachers saw the cycle as the 'recipe' to follow, the expectation. The teachers used the cycle to frame their procedures for 'assessment, planning and evaluation' and together designed how the cycle would apply in practice.

However, what I have come to see is that, on the one hand the teachers were following the steps of the 'formal' planning cycle and accepted this approach as useful and necessary, while on the other, they saw it as having limited use for their practice. Brown (2003) found there was more than one set of beliefs that shaped practitioners' actions in the settings she explored. In Brown's words:

...there are *multiple* cultures at work that reflect 'different conceptualisations of childhood and how children learn. If innovation for improvement is to be effective, it has to be rooted in the playroom and in the ways in which the *insiders* make sense of what they do, and these do not necessarily reflect the conceptual frameworks used by *outsiders*. (p. 4)

Positioning parents: 'Insiders' or 'outsiders'?

During the writing of this dissertation I began to wonder if parents were considered to be 'insiders' or 'outsiders' by the teachers in this study. Brown (2003) had defined the children and teachers as the 'insiders', and used this dichotomy in the sense of 'outsiders' setting the expectations for the practice of 'insiders'. In consideration of Brown's discussion I had placed parents as 'insiders' alongside teachers and children, although Brown had not mentioned parents in her discussion of 'insiders'. I began to think of parents in the context of my study setting and came to see that the teachers did not only face 'insider', 'outsider' expectations as Brown discusses, but there was yet a third vital dimension of importance to them. This third dimension being, the place of parents.

The tremendous importance teachers put on their relationships and communication with parents made it clear to me that parents were, perhaps a different sort of 'outsider' to those

described by Brown, at least as far as audiences for assessment documentation was concerned. The teachers spoke of the profile books and planning documentation as being a type of record, so parents could see what their child did and learnt at the centre. The documentation in this sense was an attempt at shortening the distance for parents between being ‘outside’ of the day-to-day happenings of the centre and being ‘inside’ this. The question is though, did this documentation assist in shortening this gap? As ‘insiders’ the teachers believed this documentation, particularly the profile books, aided in supporting and building relationships, but what about shared understandings? The teachers wanted to communicate with parents about their child’s time at the centre, to create a record for absent parents, to show the journey of the child’s learning at the centre and to show what they planned for children. The teachers certainly recorded exemplars of the child’s time at the centre, but to what extent did the teachers help parents develop understandings about the learning the teachers valued and of their responses to this? More often than not, teachers relied on parents to interpret the observations contained in the profile books, to identify the significance of these examples to the child as the teacher saw it. Did the parents understand this responsibility, or did parents see these books as a record of their child’s time at the centre that could be kept to look back on over the years? And what of the planning formats, were these accessible to parents? Could parents make sense of what the teachers had cryptically documented? In hindsight, exploration of parents’ views about the documentation in this study could have shed some light on answers to these questions.

Assessment in Context: Making Assessment Their Own

The teachers in my study held their own contextualized view of how the ‘planning cycle’ could work in their setting and to what extent, and for what purposes, they would emphasise this cycle in their work with children and families, and each other. Brown and her colleagues too found (Stephen, Brown and Cope, 2001, cited in Brown, 2003), that

practitioners took into account the context of their setting when they applied 'outsider' frameworks to practice:

Although the practitioners were well able to engage with the outsiders' framework for good practice when necessary (for example, during inspections or professional development events), they had quite different and distinctive ways of thinking about their work *as they were doing it*. In contrast, the insiders' perspective took account of uncertainties, insecurities, complexity, flexibility and dynamism in the playroom. (p. 5 emphasis in original)

The teachers in my study adapted the procedures they had developed in response to the expectation of using the cycle at their setting just as Brown suggests. The teachers could confidently articulate the 'planning cycle' to me, while at the same time altered it as needed in the context of their work with children. For example, I asked the teachers if they could draw for me the 'cycle' they kept referring to. The supervisor was going to remind the group to do this between planning meetings but had forgotten. When I saw them next I asked if anyone had found a chance to draw the cycle. The supervisor immediately asked the group to draw their concept of 'the cycle', handing out pieces of paper to everyone. Within a minute or two most had drawn me the cycle with ease. They could each illustrate what this process looked like in action for them. However, as teachers were handing these to me, Jo, one of the 'over two teachers' said, 'Here is the proper way you are supposed to do it, but that's not how we always do it here.' When I pursued this comment further she said, 'It's more like cycles on top of cycles, with things coming in and out all the time.' Bridget added, 'Yes, I agree, it's much more muddled-up than that.' While the teachers accepted the 'recipe', because they felt obliged to do so from their training and experiences, they also rejected it by pointing out how different and more complex reality was for them.

According to the discussion of the cycle illustrated in *Quality in Action* (1998) 'educators generally follow the cycle'. By positioning the cycle as something that is 'generally' followed, and detailing this cycle through illustration and text without any alternative

examples, suggests that the cycle is the norm, and the expectation. *Quality in Action* provides the following detail of the steps of the cycle:

Observe, and gather information about, children's actions, thinking, schemata, and learning, using a range of methods, including written observations, conversations with children, discussions with family or whanau, video and audio recordings, photographs, and selected examples of children's work;
Interpret and analyse the information gathered;
Set learning objectives for individual children and groups of children, based on the results of observation and analysis
Plan learning experiences that will enable children to meet these objectives;
Develop and implement teaching strategies to provide the learning experiences;
Evaluate results by assessing children's learning and development in relation to learning objectives;
Reflect on the whole process. (Ministry of Education, 1998:30)

The above detail is prescriptive while at the same time *Quality in Action* makes an attempt to claim flexibility, stating that:

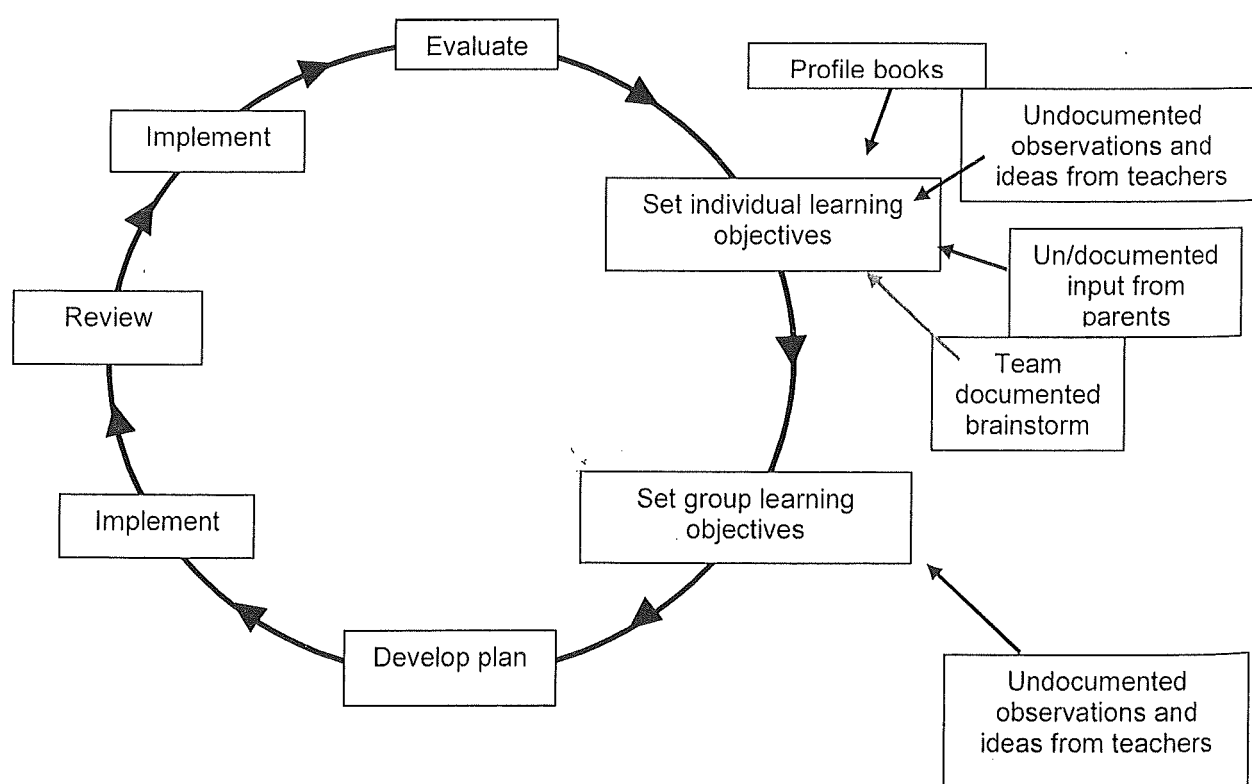
Often this process occurs automatically and is not formally notated. In practice, its individual steps may not be distinct, and different stages often coincide. Nevertheless, it is an integral part of the interactive learning experiences, opportunities for play, and daily routines that constitute a service's curriculum. (p30)

The above quote reflects some of the feelings the teachers shared about the cycle being both a sequential process to follow, as well as a process that served as a background to their interactions with children in a less formal sense. However, it is my experience as an early childhood teacher and professional development facilitator that accountability agencies such as the Education Review Office, pay little attention to this notion of flexibility and informality. Instead they expect to see the cycle as *the* approach, described by Sally Brown (2003) as the 'what to do', and they expect to see documented evidence of this as a continuous process. The teachers in this study also saw the continuous documentation of this process as an expectation.

The teachers, with their professional development facilitator, had designed a six-week rotation arrangement that was followed by both the 'under two' and the 'over two' teams..

Figure 6.11 illustrates the way the teachers implemented the cycle. On top of developing a profile book for every child, all teachers in the area were supposed to brainstorm their ideas about a child onto a sheet left in the office in the weeks before the beginning of each six-week rotation. Although sometimes this documented brainstorm was not carried out. At staff meetings, the group of teachers split into their corresponding teaching teams and completed either a planning format or an evaluation format designed specifically for the age group area. At team meetings a learning objective would be set for selected, or all, individual children by the team, although the teacher responsible for maintaining that child's profile book usually suggested this objective. A learning objective for the larger groups of children would also be set, and a plan developed that included consideration of different aspects of the areas' programme, for example, teaching strategies, activities or experiences, excursions and group times. This plan would be reviewed at the next staff meeting a fortnight later and progress in relation to the objectives and plan discussed, with some points noted. At the following fortnightly meeting, the plan would be evaluated, before beginning the cycle again.

Figure 6.11 Implementation of cycle.



Despite the established procedures at the centre for ‘assessment, planning and evaluation’ the teachers often altered the timeframes and structures they had put in place to manage the planning cycle. For example, during one of the ‘over twos’ meetings while the teachers were working on the ‘evaluation’ step of their cycle, teachers adapted the time period of the cycle to better suit a child, taking a view of learning as more complex than the cycle allowed. ‘Learning’ in this setting was not seen as something that kept to prescriptive timeframes.

Susan - *Should we just have that as ‘on-going’?*

Miranda - *On-going yes.*

Susan - *Especially for Lucas, on-going.*

Jo - *Yeah on-going.*

Abby - *Hmm.*

Susan - *Because, well you’re not going to turn them around in six weeks are you.*

Abby - *Not in that sort of gap.*

Susan - *You’re really only seeing the pattern. What’s working or not, in a sense, is what we are going to find out.*

During my interview with Bridget, a teacher in the ‘under two’ area, she described how the six-week approach didn’t always keep up with the pace of children’s learning. The teachers would therefore talk together outside of meetings, usually during their work with children and make further decisions for their children. Responding in this way to what they noticed and recognized, meant teachers were ‘assessing, planning and evaluating’ many more times a year for a child than their procedures within the cycled approach would suggest.

Bridget - *[...] because you can’t just stick it in to one box of six weeks, sometimes things happen and you just realise that that child has*

already moved on from where you thought they were and so you kind of in between times you [...] decide, and that's mostly verbal.

I interpret this example from Bridget, as being about responsive and timely assessment for learning. Bridget did not wait for the next planning meeting to think about the learning of this child and the possible 'what next?'. She identified a mismatch and altered her thinking and actions accordingly, taking into account the pace of this young child's learning. This practice is what the teachers were referring to when they spoke of their 'day-to-day' work with children. Cowie and Bell (1999) in their study of assessment in secondary school science classrooms describe a similar process of assessment where teachers during their interactions with students notice, recognise and respond to children's learning. Cowie and Bell described the way teachers were assessing in this way as 'in-flight'. The early childhood teachers in my study were assessing as they interacted with children, each other and parents. This was a continuous and open-ended process, and teachers also took into account the multi-teacher context of their environment of the centre by making sure they communicated with other teachers about their thinking.

Margaret Carr in her study of five early childhood settings found a similar type of 'describing, discussing and deciding what to do next' by teachers and pointed to this being mostly as a 'spontaneous, informal, and undocumented process' (1999, p. 14). Bridget and Rachel explained how this happens in their day-to-day practice when working with children:

Bridget – *[...] sometimes by observing something, you actually keep it in your head but you are focusing a bit more on it and then when you are ready you may write a story about it, a Learning Story because [...] sometimes you can observe something that took you, you know, kind of by surprise and you think 'oh wow!' And maybe you share it with*

somebody or whatever, and then it starts to happen maybe again and again and again, and you think 'oh look this is something important', and it starts to grow bigger and you see something developing [...] That's where it becomes more into a story kind of thing, and [...] you store it away but you're more focused on it and you recognize it again. Next time you see it [...] you are doing something with it maybe. It depends on what it is.

Rachel – *And usually when it's that interesting you go and say to someone, 'Oh wow take a look at this!'.*

In the examples described above the teachers were, as Brown (2003) suggests, taking account of the 'uncertainties, insecurities, complexity, flexibility and dynamism' (p. 5) in their context and in doing so required 'assessment, planning and evaluation' to have the same characteristics. To allow for such characteristics, teachers worked largely within the layer of assessment they called 'informal', because, I believe, they saw this as serving the interests of the children and themselves, more so than their interpretation of the 'formal recipe' did. I would go so far as to suggest that the majority of 'assessment, planning and evaluation' at the centre actually sat outside of their 'formal' process. Assessing in this way was not only about being responsive, it was also about being intuitive. Teachers assessing in intuitive ways, according to Broadfoot (2000), is often the most effective assessment. However, teachers are often challenged when required to articulate this, given their interpretation rests on 'intuitive guild knowledge acquired during the course of professional practice', and in light of pressures to employ more 'objective' approaches (Sadler, 1989; Maxwell, 1996, cited in Broadfoot, 2000:215). As discussed in the previous chapter the teachers in my study felt this pressure too, particularly from the sector's tradition of observation.

Managing three layers of assessment: the logistics and consequences

At any given time it was typical for the study centre to have between 65 and 70 children on its roll. The logistics of managing three layers of assessment processes at the centre for this number of children in a multi-teaching team, presented a number of challenges for teachers. Add into this equation, the 'outsider' expectations and 'insider' expectations, and assessment indeed becomes a very tricky process to manage. A number of practical dilemmas emerged for the teachers as they attempted to juggle both a systematic approach and an open-ended approach to the complex issue of teaching and learning in an early childhood setting. The first hurdle to overcome for teachers was managing the profile books, the second was to develop, implement and evaluate the 'formal' planning.

As I stated previously, it was typical for the centre to have between 65 and 70 children on its roll. The 'under two' area had a group size of 9 children with a ratio of 1 adult to 3 children, the 'over two' area had a group size of 35 with a ratio of 1 adult to 7 Children. Given the teachers' time limitations, this meant that the 'over two' teachers could only manage to work through the cycled rotation of six-weeks, once, possibly twice a year per child. The teachers' 'insider' view was that this didn't seem enough and they were not sure what to do about this, but as 'insiders' they could also see that this was not a serious concern, given their continuous focus on individual children within their shared team philosophy, primary caregiving system and profile books practices that the teachers saw as sitting largely outside of the 'formal' cycle:

There's some parts of me that thinks oh no we should be able to do it better than this. We should be able to do more children at once or we should be able to do that. [...] We've tried to find a way that is achievable and tried to make sure that we get through looking at each child each individual, as a group. I mean every child is being looked at as an individual all the time by different team members, primary

caregivers [...] but I mean as a group. There's part of me that goes, oooh that child started in January and we don't really get a chance to sit down and discuss as a team until August or whatever, and it's [...] well that's just not good enough [...] That's a huge amount of time, [...] we're not really doing that child justice perhaps. But then again that individual, that caregiver of theirs, is, hopefully. [...] really how do we work it? (Emma)

Talking with each other during the team meetings and 'touching base' about what was happening at the centre for each individual child, seemed most important to Emma, a point stressed by other teachers too as being 'vital'. For the teachers this was about 'knowing the child well' and 'knowing the child as an individual', expressions the teachers used a number of times during interviews. Emma and Rachel shared at the group interview how that the need to know the individual child well had a lot to do with the nature of childcare and the fact that, for many children, most of their week days were spent at the centre.

Rachel – *Well I think you have to know the children really well
[inaudible] especially because they are here all day, for five days a
week it's really important to get to know them well. It's kind of like
this a family, this is a different family.*

Emma – *Really, because if you don't know them well, and they are spending
40 hours or plus with us, then who is going to know them?*

The teacher: child ratios, group size and physical size of the 'under two' area, meant teachers working in this area were able to talk more often to each other during their day, whereas the 'over two' teachers spoke of feeling 'isolated'. The 'under two' team set 'learning objectives' for every child in their area at the beginning of the six-week rotation. Leaving any child out from this process was not something these teachers felt they had to,

or could do. Both groups of teachers also developed an overall 'learning objective' for each group, as suggested by *Quality in Action* (1998). In setting a group 'learning objective' and plan, the teachers felt these applied to all children in the area. Teachers said that the development of 'individual objectives' for one child, ultimately benefited the other children too, a point I will return to in a later section.

The logistics of only being able to select six children to set 'objectives' out of a large group meant the 'over two' teachers had to, in effect, nominate a child at the beginning of this cycle. In phase one I asked teachers about what they recorded in their books about children. They had used words such as, 'interests', 'achievements', 'celebrations' and 'what they have learned'. When it came to selecting a child for a 'learning objective', teachers said they focused on 'needs' often, though also stressed this wasn't always the case. Sometimes children were chosen because it was their 'turn' or because of a particularly strong interest a child had in a particular area of the programme. It seemed that when the teachers worked within the 'informal' layer of profile books they were working within what Hatherly and Sands (2002) term a credit model, but when it came to applying the cycle, they were drawn *more often* towards working within a deficit model.

Anne Hatherly and Lorraine Sands (2002) in their discussion of assessment in early childhood settings in this country, present a challenge to teachers to consider whether their focus should be on children's deficits or credits. Hatherly and Sands point to credit models sitting 'comfortably' with the principles of *Te Whāriki* and draw on both research (Hidi, Reniger & Krapp, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, cited in Hatherly and Sands, 2002) and 'common sense' to say that:

Learning is more effective when it is derived from interests, motivation and the sense of confidence that comes from working with one's strengths. In order to champion children's learning opportunities, teachers need a comprehensive

knowledge of their abilities. Therefore, an assessment approach that sets out to articulate and highlight these aspects in children's lives is more likely to lead to further learning than approaches which treat children as needy and powerless. (p. 11)

There are a number of factors that came into play that led teachers in this deficit direction, including time limitations, the number of teachers in this team, a high emphasis on communication and the type of 'requirements' set for the team, based on interpretation of the cycle. Given all of these factors, the teachers were seemingly 'forced' to focus on the most pressing issues at hand, and more often than not, this seemed to be children's 'deficits'. Where the profile books illustrated a wider, more holistic picture of the child, the documentation the teachers associated with the planning cycle, allowed only a narrow view of the child and their learning. This is not to say that the team discussions followed the narrow linear pathway they understood was set by *Quality in Action*, the centre's planning policy or the planning format used by the teachers. Rather, team planning meetings were vibrant, lively affairs, a weave of complex stories of learning and teaching at the centre, a focus I will return to later in my discussion of these meetings.

A further issue that relates to the logistics of implementing the planning cycle centered around documentation. As discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the profile books, when it came to documenting the planning process, teachers used time-saving methods and minimized what they wrote on plans. For example, in the 'under two' team meetings one person was given the task of keeping brief notes and during non-contact time these were typed up into a format where the person responsible would cut and paste goals from the strands of *Te Whaariki*, to form part of what was documented. Only short statements were used to capture the various aspects of the planning, which included a focus, rationale, links to *Te Whaariki*, learning objectives for individuals and the group, activities or ideas to be implemented and adult responsibilities. Figure 6.12 provides an illustration of what was

recorded on a planning form following one of the planning meetings. This plan was set for a six-week timeframe to be reviewed halfway through this period.

Figure 6.12 An example of the information documented on an 'under two' area planning form.

Under Two Group Plan		
Focus	Rationale	Links to Te Whaariki
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting children's early language development. Toddlers have opportunities for active exploration Transition children to the preschool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want to enhance and build on children's early language skills and support the younger children in their exploration skills 	<p>Six links established e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution/Mana Tangata Goal 3 – Children and their families experience and environment where they are encouraged to learn with and alongside others Well being/Mana Atua Goal 2 – Children experience and environment where their well being is nurtured
Learning Objectives		Activities/Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active exploration Transition to the pre-school Language development 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language development – song, finger rhymes, stories and magnetic board stories Exploration – tactile experiences e.g. gloop, glue, water, sand, sawdust Visits to the preschool
Adult's Responsibilities	Group times	Individual Learning Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking children on visits to preschool Magnet board stories – laminator Book on finger rhymes Ordering more books – trolley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including magnet board stories, finger rhymes 	<p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language and transition Settle back in Language Offering challenging explo. opportunities

What is recorded on the 'under two' planning form is a bare outline of what was discussed at this one and a half hour meeting. I wondered when reading this, who this documentation was for? Was it for 'insiders', 'outsiders', or both?

The teachers had spoken previously about being able to 'show what we do here', implying an 'outsider' accountability audience, while at the same time teachers said the cycle gave them direction, so presumably the documentation served this purpose too. I believe this plan is written in a way that would be very difficult for an 'outsider' to have any real understanding of. I suggest that what was documented above is more like prompts to the teachers, making this documentation primarily for the teachers. While at the same time the repetitive nature of what is written reflects accountability purposes. Perhaps the teachers felt they should put something in each of the boxes. However, again I doubt this would provide an accountability agency with clarity around the complexity of the discussion or decision-making processes at the centre. On asking the teachers who these plans were for they pointed out three audiences, 1) 'ERO' and 'The Ministry' or 'the officials coming in to look at what we do', 2) parents and 3) themselves or 'self', while adding that the plan being for the children 'goes without saying'. 'Self' was only mentioned in passing by the group and discussion focused much more on 'the officials' and parents. However, just as for the profile books, parents were seen as the primary audience for the completed plans.

Rachel - *From my perspective I think the parents, and communicating with parents, is really important*

Emma - *That's one of the first focuses really isn't it, for parents, for their understanding, of what we are doing with their children.*

Although parents were considered the primary audience for the plans, the teachers were frustrated at times that some parents didn't value the written plans or the planning process established for their children. The teachers expressed real disappointment that a parent had come to one of them recently and asked, 'What do you need to plan for, really?' In this case the teachers felt that this parent had 'fallen through the gap' to ask such a question. The

teachers also indicated that they liked to keep group planning simple for the parents, so that they could understand what they were doing for their child.

The 'officials coming in' were regarded as a likely audience for the teachers even though they also were aware that it was only likely that the Education Review Office would review the centre perhaps every 4 years, and that the Ministry of Education would rarely visit the centre. Whether these audiences were 'real' or not, the teachers agreed they would continue what they were doing, not only for parents, but also for themselves in terms of their own sense of accountability to what was 'required', indicating to me that their interpretation of the 'planning cycle', was deeply embedded within what they felt was right for them to do as early childhood professionals.

Jo - *And I think we would do the same thing, whether we thought the Ministry was coming in tomorrow or whether we had no idea whether they were ever going to come in, I hope, I think we kind of have the same expectation that we would still be meeting this requirement.*

Emma - *Yeah, you've still got to have a standard, you know, consistency between what we all do [...]*

The teachers had three reasons for documenting their discussions and decisions in the way they did for themselves. The teachers spoke of this documentation as being important for 'ensuring continuity' and 'consistency' between what they said they would do, and what they actually did, for maintaining a sense of internal accountability, and for ensuring a clear team direction, as well as, a clear direction for each child. However, as one teacher pointed out, writing a plan is one thing 'doing it' is another. Managing this six-week rotation became complicated at times for some teachers, as Michelle pointed out:

[...] most times we manage to get to where we want to but [...] because you've got to have them all in mind. The one that you're choosing and the one that you've chosen, so yeah it's quite tough some times, because you don't want to forget.

Documenting the planning and maintaining the profile books were seen as procedures that helped establish a sense of direction for teachers. However, it also had the purpose of keeping team members internally accountable, to make sure things got done. Some felt that sometimes the accountability driver tipped the balance:

I think out of [...] experience I think that if things would be left a little bit informal then sometimes it doesn't happen because there's always a reason why things can't happen. [...] I think you do have to [...] make that extra effort to make things happen [...] I think it works for me that way but and I think it also works for the nursery, for the other staff [...] when people let's say, would express a real passion for something and bring up ideas of how things could be [...] I would think that that person has thought about it and has a vision for something. So I would say to them, 'well would you like to do that? Would you like to take responsibility for that?' and sometimes yes [...] that would be noted down y'know [...] Because sometimes good ideas go by the by if they're not written down. (Bridget)

I think it was really good to do that because it gives your job much more meaning [...] there was none of that accountability, and now its gone a bit the other way but still I mean it does [...] make you more professional and give you more because [...] there were those of us who were conscientious and there were those of us who sort of spent a bit of time mucking about. (Rachel)

Rachel associated a sense of 'professionalism' to the profile books and planning process they implemented at the centre. The 'formalisation' of the team's processes of 'assessment, planning and evaluation', through documentation and processes such as, the profile books and 'planning cycle', seemed to make teachers feel that they were able to show people that they were 'teachers' rather than the 'babysitters' which they believed they were perceived by some in society as. Bridget described this as 'still an early childhood thing':

That we have to still prove ourselves to be of value, and that's what I feel with a lot of things, with people, with society as a whole....

Collaboration contributes to keeping assessment complex

Though the teachers had 'outsider' audiences in mind as well as 'insiders' at team planning meeting times, I felt the teachers placed documentation below their desire for thorough discussion about children and what was happening in the programme. The teachers had intense conversations about children around what the teachers noticed and recognized as important for that child and how they might response to it. The documentation of these ideas at most times was not a high priority. Documenting did not seem to be the main driver for the teachers. Rather developing shared meaning and understanding of the child was. Often the teacher given responsibility for writing on the plan would pull the other teachers back from their discussion about children to the task of completing the planning forms. Several times during the meetings, I would hear the teacher holding the pen ask, 'So, what should I write down?' or 'I've forgotten, what I was supposed to write?' Often the discussion was in full-flight and the teachers would continue without a reply, or one of the teachers would offer a suggestion. During individual interviews some teachers spoke of needing to finish the plans later because they had run out of time during meetings to finish these and that occasionally these would go uncompleted. I do not suggest that teachers didn't feel they should do these. Rather I got a sense that given the workloads of teachers, they had higher priorities.

[...] we will commonly finish our planning meetings by saying 'ok, well, we haven't written everything down so we'll all try and, you know, write a bit more on there, and we'll just leave it in the office for a day or two and we'll all see if we can finish it off or whatever'. And it never happens, and then it gets stuck in the folder, and it just doesn't, it doesn't make it to the wall. [...] there is just too much to do at those meetings. We very rarely finish a whole plan satisfactorily. (Jo)

In my observations of the teachers during staff meetings, I noticed that the teachers' level of discussion about children was far more complex than the documented planning forms would suggest. For an 'outsider' looking in on this documentation, it would be difficult to grasp the complexity of the teachers' understanding of the children or their discussion and

decision-making processes. The process the teams were implementing at their staff planning meetings was much more elaborate than their documentation.

As I wrote earlier, although the teachers used documentation formats to set a direction for the focus of team meetings, in some ways these forms directed the conversation only to a limited degree, largely teachers discussed what they felt was relevant, regardless of what they were 'supposed' to record on the format. When I showed the teachers some of the videos of their planning meetings, Jo reflected on the number of times they shifted direction in their discussion.

We can be heading along in some direction then all of a sudden we've, we've all got to talk about some other child, or something else that comes up...

The teachers weren't surprised that they shifted tack in their discussion, however, they were surprised at how many times they did so during their discussion. This shifting focus and making connections was what most teachers had described as 'getting off track'. However, in another sense, they were very much 'on track'. This track being aimed at making meaning from what they had noticed about children, recognizing the many connections between members of the learning community and deciding 'what next'. Discussion at team meetings was what Drummond (1993) describes as the 'striving to understand' part of assessment. These meetings were times that together, teachers could share their stories about children, their theories and possible ideas about what they could do as teachers to support what they saw was important to the children. These teachers were not only drawing from what they noticed during their 'everyday practice' but, as Drummond suggests, were also putting their 'understanding to good use' (p. 13). Talking together as a group to share perspectives on the child and what was working in the programme for them, and what wasn't working, meant that teachers were widening the view of the child and making connections between the many intricacies of their teaching-learning context.

I had previously pointed to team planning meetings as having two purposes at the beginning of this chapter: 1) to implement the various steps of the planning cycle, and 2) to establish and maintain the direction of the team. The teachers saw team planning meetings as having many connected purposes, such as:

'Ensuring the programme is appropriate for children.'

'For planning, to help manage your day.'

'Working as a team, working toward a goal.'

'Developing a shared language.'

'Having a shared direction.'

'To make sure children are not left drifting in their learning.'

Though teachers talked of 'getting off track' during my discussion of team planning meetings with them, they also talked about the connections they made between the learning of one child and the learning of others when it came to discussing and decision-making in this way, a belief Jo described as 'valid'.

Jo – *I think it's valid what we do [...] when meeting the needs of a few individuals we are actually meeting the needs of a much wider group of children [...]*

Sarah – *Because you'll be talking about one child and you'll say, 'oh that's the same as this child or more children'*

Jo – *And you're not going off randomly. Why do you start talking about another child? Because you see a connection.*

The process of 'seeing' and making connections extended beyond establishing links from one child to another. During discussion associated with 'setting a learning objective' for individual children, the teachers widened the picture to include and consider a more holistic view of what is, or what could impact on the child's learning. For example, during one of the team meetings, the teachers started to make connections from the moment a child's name was mentioned to 'set a learning objective'. These connections included: links between the child now and the child's past, the present and their possible future, what was

happening for the child and their family within the home environment, centre routines, resources, the physical environment, housekeeping, team procedures, teaching strategies, responsibilities of teachers, other possible goals for the child, goals for other children, the child's interests in the programme, theory from their training and what the teachers understood were the views of parents.

The view of learning in action suggested here, is similar to that of Bronwen Cowie and Margaret Carr who take a sociocultural view of learning they describe as 'distributed over, stretched across, people, places and things (Perkins, 1992; Salomon, 1993 cited in Cowie and Carr, 2004, p. 95). In this situation the teachers started with the child and worked outwards establishing the wider picture for a child before they were drawn back to setting a much narrower 'learning objective'. In this sense the teachers' 'insider' view was complex and connected, whereas, through the setting of 'learning objectives' the teachers established a narrow more linear pathway for the child and worked against their more holistic view of the child. This illustrates the gap between teacher interpretation of the context free model of 'what to do' and the teachers' view of learning and teaching here.

Conclusion

The 'insider' view of assessment presented in this chapter paints a complex, connected view of assessment in an early childhood setting, one that would not be made visible by taking a shallow look in from the outside. The teachers in this setting relied on the strength of their communication and relationships to support this complexity and connectedness as they made meaning of assessment in their context. Assessment in this setting was distributed across various members of the community and teachers worked hard at maintaining these connections. Though the teachers' view of teaching, learning and assessment was complex,

some of their interpretations of 'outsider' expectations worked against this view. However, in many ways the teachers also resisted this simplification by the actions they took, whether conscious or intuitive. Collaborative discussion and meaning making was pivotal to assessment practice in this setting, and provided a point where each component of their assessment practices could be drawn together. Teachers relied on a strong commitment to their own values and expectations, reflection and intuition, as they strived to make meaning of assessment in context.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The early childhood education sector may have a short history of formalized assessment, but the emergence of new expectations around assessment practice have been fraught with difficulties none-the-less. These difficulties have emerged as tensions that developed through a combination of rapid change and growth, in an administrative sense, and a dramatic theoretical shift illustrated through the curriculum framework of *Te Whaariki*. The theoretical shift represented by *Te Whaariki* for the early childhood sector, reflects a wider paradigm shift for notions of educational assessment. Educational assessment was founded on positivist values, and these values have dominated mainstream education for over a century. However, as educators and researchers question positivist logic and values, alternative frames have begun to emerge. For the early childhood sector in this country the most recognizable alternative assessment paradigm to emerge is the interpretivist paradigm, a paradigm that sits comfortably with the sociocultural theories *Te Whaariki* is influenced by.

To say an alternative paradigm ‘has emerged’, does however, simplify the matter somewhat. The emergence of an alternative assessment paradigm has significant implications for teacher practice, particularly in light of the domination of positivist thinking in the wider context of educational values. The use of the term ‘emergence’ of an alternative, suggests this paradigm is gradually being recognized in the sector, and for some in the sector this is the case. Those people have gradually come to recognize a shift in the view of assessment being presented through local and international assessment literature. But for many in the

sector this is not the case, and their view remains entrenched within positivist traditions. Difficulties have arisen for the sector, when the competing values of these paradigms are combined within the context of imposed expectations, whose desirability have largely gone unquestioned by the sector. The sector has been presented these competing values via the various policy and resource documents intended to guide practice, and through professional development providers, training institutions and accountability agencies. For the team of early childhood teachers in this study, they were required to negotiate a pathway through these mixed messages and expectations, to design assessment practices in their setting, which as a result reflected these conflicting values.

Although the teachers in this study spoke of the challenges that implementing assessment related procedures presented for them, most of the tensions that surfaced went unchallenged in any overt or conscious way. Instead, the teachers either embraced what had the most meaning to them, or resisted that which did not. To understand how these teachers made meaning of assessment, in both a theoretical and practical sense, required consideration of the 'insider' and 'outsider' influences on their construction of assessment. How the teachers made sense of the expectations of assessment put on them, could best be understood through their own experiences of those expectations. This required careful consideration of the teachers' beliefs and actions from their own perspectives, something I became more conscious of myself, through the approaches I took in the second phase of data collection and analysis.

For these teachers, negotiating the meaning of assessment meant they relied on their training, experience, intuition and guidance from professional development facilitators, to make judgments about how best to undertake assessment in their context. In turn, these teachers were required to design their assessment practice, and how best to manage this

task, based on this construction and under the gaze of ‘outsider’ expectations, while at the same time striving to balance their own ‘insider’ expectations and standards (Brown, 2003). This pull of accountability to ‘outsider’ expectations is pitted against what the teachers intuitively believe is right for their children and parents at the centre. All the while, the judgments and decisions these teachers made, were backgrounded by the competing paradigms of *Te Whaariki* and of assessment, that were reinforced through their training, experiences of professional development and the accountability measures put in place by Government.

The teachers in this setting identified a number of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ audiences of assessment, and who the teachers recognized as the audience ultimately influenced the purpose and nature of the procedures and processes they put in place to manage assessment at the centre. In one sense the teachers were deeply concerned that they must make assessment transparent, to show ‘outsiders’ what they do, and to follow the perceived expectations of their sector. In another sense though, the teachers resisted the interests of the distant ‘outsiders’, such as accountability agencies and the Ministry of Education, to keep assessment within the realms of what had the most meaning to them in their work with children, parents and each other.

Though the teachers accommodated the requirements of assessment defined by ‘outsider’ expectations, they did so with minimal compromise of their own beliefs and values. In accommodating these requirements the teachers contained the most ‘formal’ aspects of assessment as they saw it, by limiting the extent to which these ‘formal’ procedures were followed or impacted on their day-to-day work with children, parents and each other. Instead, the teachers favoured and used ‘informal’ approaches to assessment, because they saw these ‘informal’ approaches as supporting their goals of building and maintaining

strong relationships with children, parents and each other and because they found these more interesting and relevant to them as teachers.

The teachers understood assessment in their setting as a complex and connected process and identified assessment as sited within the 'informal' day-to-day teaching and learning interactions, 'informal' documented observations presented in profile books, and 'formal' assessment, that they identified as part of the 'planning cycle', a processes sited most recognizably within practice associated with staff planning meetings. Although the teachers identified with these different sites of assessment, they spoke of the 'informal' undocumented, day-to-day teaching and learning interactions they had with children as the most useful and interesting type of assessment to them.

The sector's positivist assessment traditions remained, in some ways, a strong influence on the assessment practices of teachers in this study. Their beliefs around observation and their interpretation of the planning cycle were two ways these positivist values presented in the data. For most of the teachers these particular beliefs were established through their training and remained important influences on their thinking. When they faced new approaches to assessment, such as *Learning Stories*, they failed to recognize the alternative view these represented and applied their traditional meanings to these. The teachers also actively rejected some of the positivist values of their training when it came to applying assessment theory to practice. Though the teachers seemed to connect with positivist beliefs, they also abandoned these in favour of approaches that had more meaning to them. Approaches that they believed best suited the parents and children they worked with, and themselves.

Early in this study I felt that recognition of a paradigm shift from positivist to interpretivist views could be supported with greater conceptual coherence between policy and resource

documents and the theoretical position of *Te Whaariki*, and that this alignment would assist teachers better to apply this theory to assessment practice. What the teachers in this study have reinforced to me is, that exposure to these resources and documents alone will not assist practitioners in navigating new expectations in their context. Now, more than ever, I consider the roots of meaning to be situated within the beliefs and realities of the ‘insiders’ of early childhood settings themselves, and not on the judgments or meanings of ‘outsiders’. For those of us who sit outside of early childhood education settings and hope to change something about the inside of these settings, we need to be prepared to come to appreciate and value the realities and beliefs of the teachers in these settings if we are to be of any real use. Authentic, meaningful change will only come when it is situated within authenticity and meaning for those this change affects. At the same time I question whether many of the current expectations imposed on the early childhood sector through the current legislation of the DOPs, are even desirable within the context of the view of learning and teaching presented by the sociocultural theoretical position of *Te Whaariki*. As I write this dissertation the sector is awaiting the results of a regulatory review. I wonder what new expectations for assessment are waiting around the corner for teachers, and what the impact of these will have on a sector already crowded with expectations and a Government with a history of providing conflicting direction.

I began this study with my own preconceived ideas of what I might find about how a team of early childhood teachers was using narrative assessment methodology to make decisions about the programme provided for the children they worked with. I had thought I might expect to focus on the use of narrative and of whose perspectives and values these stories represented. Instead my study tackled a bigger picture of assessment for the teachers in this setting. I express no disappointment at this, for I began this study with a particular view of assessment and of what I believed it should look like in the sector, and I come away from

this study with a new level of understanding about the complex issue of assessment in early childhood education.

My view of assessment has developed and grown from my student-beginning teacher views expressed earlier in this dissertation. In recent years assessment for me has become a more complex thing. Before I began this study I felt assessment should be meaningful and authentic to the community it is situated within. I felt it unnecessary to follow a pre-prescribed approach such as the planning cycle I had come to know and trust through my own training. I believed assessment should be more dynamic, responsive and interesting than that, and that the approach taken should inform and inspire the teaching and learning process, rather than be undertaken simply because it is seen as a 'have to'. I end this study with a new level of meaning behind the word 'assessment', as well as a new level of meaning to my own role as a professional development facilitator and of my contribution to what assessment means, or could mean, for the early childhood teachers I work with.

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University of Canterbury

Department of Education

Information for Teachers

You are invited to participate as subjects in the research project 'Telling stories: An exploration of an early childhood centre's use of narrative assessment methodology for informing practice'.

The aim of the project is to find out about the use of narrative assessments (e.g. learning stories) by early childhood teachers to make decisions about the curriculum for children in an early childhood centre setting.

Your involvement in the project **will** involve:

- You being observed by the researcher in your work with children;
- Giving the researcher access to and use of assessments you have written such as those written in children's Learning Story' books;
- Participating in group and/or individual interviews with the researcher about your assessment practices, philosophies and planning for children; and,
- Allowing the researcher to observe and record the regular planning meetings you attend.

Your involvement in the project **may** involve:

- You being videotaped in your work with children for the purpose of discussion with you and/or other teachers at the centre and/or parents/whānau of children videoed and/or the children involved, during interviews.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher will allocate you and all other participants with an alias and code and all information gathered will be identified either with that code or alias. At no time will identifying information about you be shared with anyone outside of the project or with other participants in the project without your permission.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Education degree by Keryn Davis, under the supervision of Dr Baljit Kaur and Assoc. Prof. Alison Gilmore, who can be contacted at 3492579 (wk) 3772337 (hm) or via email keryn.davis@cce.ac.nz She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Telling stories: an exploration of and early childhood centre's use of narrative assessment methodology for informing practice

Teacher Consent Form

The information collected in this project may include observations by the researcher, assessments written by you and parents/whānau, interviews and input from children through conversations. Video recordings may be made for the purpose of discussion with you, other members of the teaching team at the centre, parents of the children involved or the child or children themselves.

Your permission is required before any observations (including recordings) are made of you or any examples of assessments you have written be used in this project.

(Please circle the
which applies)

I give permission for the researcher to observe me in my work with children and collect observations for the purpose of this project

Yes No

I give permission for the researcher to view my written assessments

Yes No

I give permission for selected items of assessment that I have written and/or that may include me working with the children to be copied and included in the project (These assessments may include photos but no photos will be published)

Yes No

I give permission for the researcher to make audio recordings of interviews (both individual or group) and planning meetings that I may be involved in

Yes No

I give permission for video recordings to be taken of me working with children as part of this project for the purpose of discussion with teachers and/or parents and/or children of the centre (No video footage will be reproduced or published)

Yes No

I understand that the above may be used for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a Master of Education degree and may also be used in presentations and papers about the project and in associated research.

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Full name: (Please Print)

First name

Surname

Signature:

Date:

University of Canterbury

Department of Education

Information for Parents

You and your child are invited to participate as subjects in the research project 'Telling stories: An exploration of an early childhood centre's use of narrative assessment methodology for informing practice'.

The aim of the project is to find out about the use of narrative assessments (e.g. learning stories) by early childhood teachers to make decisions about the curriculum for children in an early childhood centre setting.

Your involvement in the project **will** involve:

- You giving permission for your child to be observed by the researcher; and,
- You giving permission for the researcher to access and use the information contained in your child's 'Learning Story Book' (including anything you may have written about your child in this book).

Your involvement in the project **may** involve:

- You participating in short interviews with the researcher and/or other parents; and/or,
- Your child being videotaped for the purpose of discussion with you/whānau during interviews, your child and/or teachers at the centre.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher will allocate you and your child with an alias and code and all information gathered will be identified either with that code or alias. At no time will identifying information about you or your child be shared with anyone outside of the project or with any other participants in the project without your permission.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Education degree by Keryn Davis, under the supervision of Dr Baljit Kaur and Assoc. Prof. Alison Gilmore, who can be contacted at 3492579 (wk) 3772337 (hm) or via email keryn.davis@cce.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Telling stories: an exploration of and early childhood centre's use of narrative assessment methodology for informing practice

Parent Consent Form

Information collected in this project may include observations by the researcher, assessments given by teachers and yourself, interviews and input from children through conversations. Video recordings may be made for the purpose of discussion with teachers at the centre, parents/whānau of children videoed or children themselves.

Your permission is required before any observations (including recordings) are made of your child or any examples of assessments teachers or yourself have written be used in this project.

(Please circle that which applies)

I give permission for the researcher to observe my child and to collect written observations of my child for the purpose of this project

Yes No

I give permission for the researcher to view my child's 'Learning Story Book'

Yes No

I give permission for selected items of assessments that have been written about my child by teachers to be copied and included in the project (These assessments may include examples of your child's work and photos but no photos will be published)

Yes No

I give permission for video recordings to be taken of my child as part of this project for the purpose of discussion with teachers at the centre and/or myself and/or my child (No image will be reproduced or published)

Yes No

I give permission for selected items I have written about my child to be copied and included in the project

Yes No

I give permission for the researcher to make audio recordings of interviews (both in group) that I may be involved in

Yes No

My child's name: _____
First name
Surname

I understand that the above may be used for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a master or education degree and may also be used in presentations and papers about the project and in associated research.

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate and also allow my child to participate in the project. I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project and withdraw my child also, including withdrawal of any information I, or my child, may have provided.

I name: (Please Print) _____
First name
Surname

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C – Possible prompts/questions for group interview

Potential prompts to start discussion for unstructured interview with team

Tell me about your philosophy – about the philosophy of this place

Tell me about what you hope children will gain from being here

Tell me about what you value about children's learning

If you were describing to someone from outside the centre about what you do here...what would you say

Describe what 'being a team' is here

Describe what 'team teaching' is here

Let's talk about assessment now...can you describe what 'assessment' means to you

If you could describe assessment at this place how would you describe it...

Why do you do assessment here?

What are the things you find interesting or useful about assessment here?

Is there anything you find frustrating or challenging about this?

Do you discuss assessments together as a team? How and when?

Who's involved in assessment?

Who decides what's worth writing about?

You write LS's here. Where and how do these fit in to what you do?

What do you think is most interesting or useful to parents?

How would you describe the parents role...what do you see is the parents role in assessment

How would you describe the child's role...do they have a role...what might that be?

Tell me about planning...what does that word mean to you...what does it look like in this place?

Why do you do planning here?

What do you find most useful or interesting about planning?

Is there anything you find frustrating or challenging about this?

What do you think is interesting or helpful to parents about planning?

How would you describe the parent's role in planning?

What about children...do children have a role in planning?

Who decides what's worth planning for?

How do you decide what to plan for? What is this based on?

Who decides what gets written?

Are there things you wouldn't write about? Why?

What do you think are the factors that have influenced you in your decisions about how to assess? Plan?

What factors do you believe impact on assessment and planning here?